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5 CENTS.

ALL AROUND

LOST.
IN THE HEART OF CHINA.



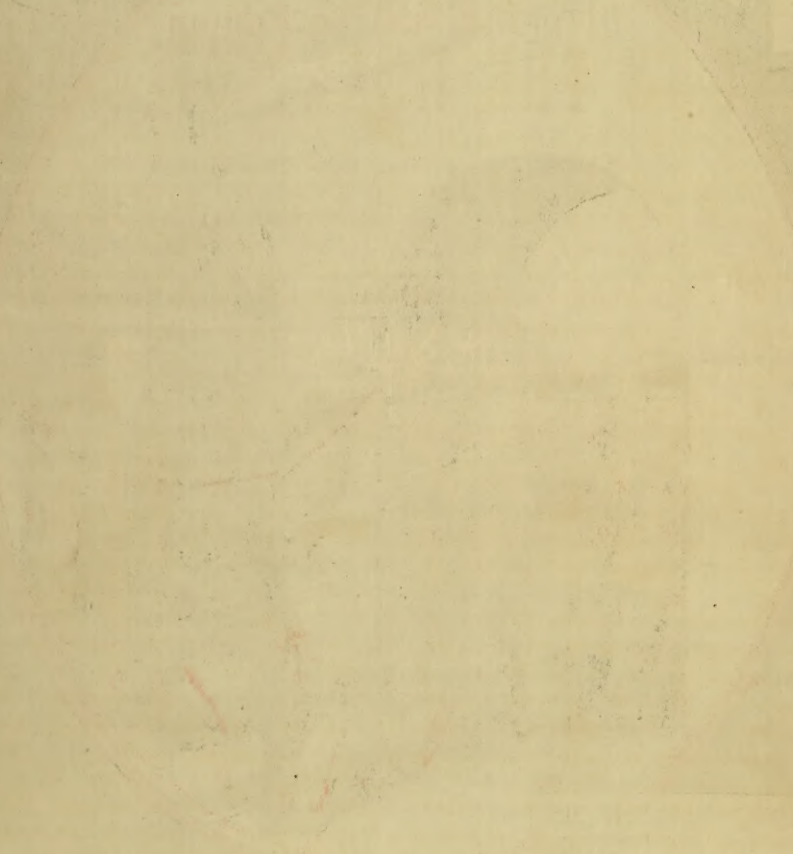
Harry started toward the arch, and the Lama uttered a sneering laugh. Four Mongols, armed with spears, appeared in the opening and aimed at the boy.

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PRICE 5 CENTS.

LOST IN THE HEART OF CHINA

OR,

A YANKEE BOY IN THE LAND OF SKULLS

By DICK ELLISON

CHAPTER I.

THE INJURY TO THE SACRED DOG.

"What do you think of this town, Harry?"

The speaker paused and glanced along the wide and well-kept streets, and then gazed out on the broad expanse of the Yang-tse-Kiang, which skirted the edge of the town.

"I think it's as pretty as a picture," responded Harry Hale, "and for its size, Bathang will compare very favorably with any place in Eastern Thibet, but if the guide books and other accounts which I have read are correct, then the city of Lassa, where the Grand Lama lives in one of the greatest palaces on the face of the earth, is as beautiful as a dream. Knowing that you intended to visit it, Mr. Morton, I have studied it up time after time, until I feel that I know it almost as well as I know the city of Hartford, where I was born and raised, and could go about it without making many inquiries."

"How far is it from here?"

"I understand that it is about two or three days' journey."

"Well, I have found out about all that is useful to me in this place, and in the course of the next few days we will start on our way to Lassa, the far-famed metropolis of Thibet. But, Harry, how did this beautiful country ever get such a repulsive name as 'The Land of Skulls'?"

"That," said Harry Hale, "is on account of the fact that there is no such thing as a burial here. Some of the high priests are dried up by chemicals and their bodies kept to be worshiped over, and some of them are burned, but the common people are either placed on the high mountains where the air dries them up, or else they are thrown into the river, or their bodies cut up and fed to the holy dogs, thousands of which are kept by the priests, and as a result of nobody really being buried there are any amount of skulls to be seen rolling around on the table lands and in the valleys. In fact, animal skulls are used to ornament the roofs of the peasants' houses."

"Very interesting," said Mr. Morton, "but it makes me feel that I don't want to die in this country."

The two speakers, a man and a boy, were walking slowly along the streets of Bathang, a town about the third in importance in Thibet.

Ralph Morton was a tall, athletic man of thirty, a col-

lege graduate, and a man with a taste for investigating conditions in different countries, and he was now in Thibet as a commissioner from the United States to report upon the manufactures and mineral resources of the Thibetan government. He had a fair knowledge of Chinese, and when he advertised for a young man to accompany him on his travels as secretary and companion, he stipulated that the applicant must be able to speak a little of the language of the country to which he was bound, and his delight can be imagined when Harry Hale applied for the position in a letter written entirely in Chinese.

When it came to an interview Morton found that Harry was able to read, write and speak the language fluently, because he had exchanged lessons with a Chinese cook in Hartford until both became well skilled in the two languages, and the boy was at once engaged to go to Thibet.

But Harry Hale possessed other qualifications that fitted him to become the companion of a man who was undertaking a journey that might not be entirely free from danger. He was seventeen years old, tall and broad-shouldered, well skilled in all athletic exercises, and was also well educated and very agreeable in his manners.

It was in the long afternoon that they were strolling through the streets of Bathang, enjoying the summer air of the temperate clime, and Mr. Morton was gazing admiringly at the beautiful sky, when the boy caught him by one arm with a warning cry of:

"Look out for the dog."

Harry Hale was always on the lookout for these sacred dogs, which are revered by the people of Thibet, and which, as a natural consequence, stretch themselves out on every pathway that catches their fancy, and move for nobody, the inhabitants carefully going around them, and being too superstitiously afraid of them to much more than look at them.

The boy's warning was unfortunate.

Mr. Morton made a hasty movement, and stepped too far to one side.

Had the boy remained silent it is probable that Morton would have merely touched the dog in passing, but his hasty movement had the effect of bringing one well-shod heel directly down on the animal's tail.

Ralph Morton weighed one hundred and eighty pounds, and when his heel came down upon the tail of the sacred dog, that fat and drowsy animal rose up in the air with

a succession of yelps that would have rivaled the best efforts of a circus calliope.

Bathang is a busy commercial town, and the streets are at all times well filled with people, and at the present moment the vicinity was well thronged with a laboring class of folk, either carrying loads on their heads, or else directing the loaded goats and yaks that struggled along under their burdens.

Instantly the air was rent with cries of indignation and rage.

"He has hurt the sacred dog!"

"He has killed him!"

"What does the foreign beast care for our sacred dogs?"

"See: he laughs!"

This accusation was true, for although Mr. Morton was not lacking in sympathy for the brute creation, the dog was making such a comical noise that the tall American could not restrain his laughter. Harry, however, knew that the event was a very serious matter, for he understood the Thibetans better than his employer, and he hastily said:

"Please don't laugh, Mr. Morton, or you will anger them beyond control, and then they'll become dangerous."

Morton at once stopped laughing, but the damage had already been done, as the outcries of the gathering crowd of angry people informed him, for the words were now different.

"Crush him, like he crushed the dog!"

"Beat him to death!"

"Down with the foreign beast!"

And with angry shouts the menacing crowd began to close in upon the two Americans.

Harry Hale cast a swift glance around him.

Towards the center of the town the crowd was thickest, while on the river side of them there were not more than half-a-dozen men.

The angry people were constantly pressing closer, and the boy realized that they only needed a leader to make an attack that might end in the death of himself and his employer, so he thought quickly, one eye on the crowd that was edging nearer, and the other seeking any possible avenue of escape.

He spoke up quietly:

"Mr. Morton."

"Yes."

"Are you armed?"

"No."

"Neither am I, so we have got to make a run for it. The river is not more than two hundred yards away, and the crowd on that side is very thin. Let us try a football movement, make a flying wedge of ourselves with our shoulders close together, charge towards the river, break through the thin line opposite to us, and make a dash for the water, where we can at least be on even terms with the enemy when it comes to swimming."

"I'm agreeable."

And the stalwart American moved up until his arm was touching Harry's shoulder, and then they both drew in a deep breath, while the growling Thibetans gradually closed in upon them.

"Ready?" asked the boy.

"Ready."

"Go!"

Shoulder to shoulder the man and the boy shot forth from the position they had held while the crowd was shrieking at them.

The movement was totally unexpected by those who stood in the pathway of the man and the boy, and when they made their rush with heads down and shoulders held closely together, they bowled over the people who stood in their way like so many tenpins.

To the right and to the left Harry and his employer knocked them, and thus cleared the way between themselves and the river.

Down towards the rippling water they dashed, and after them came the rest of the infuriated Thibetans, shouting out curses on the foreign beasts, and telling one another that they must have the lives of the fugitives.

Half the distance was passed over in safety.

Two of the fellows they had bowled over were upon their feet in an instant, and after them at full speed. They were fleet runners, and in a moment were up with the two Americans.

One of them had caught up a stone from the street, and paused for an instant while he took aim at Morton, who, naturally, was looked upon as the chief offender. He was about to hurl the stone at Harry's employer, when the boy spun over on his hands and feet in the style known to American lads as "turning a cartwheel," and with excellent aim struck the fellow on the side of the head with the heels of his shoes.

Down he went, and at the same instant the other fleet-

footed Thibetan got close enough to Morton to make a clumsy blow at him, which the tall American easily blocked, and then returned so cleverly that his opponent went down in a senseless heap to the ground.

At that instant a clear, musical voice, speaking in English, reached their ears, saying:

"This way, this way."

The voice came from the water, and when they glanced in that direction they saw one of the native pleasure boats gliding along the stream, propelled by the muscular efforts of half-a-dozen oarsmen, while in the stern of the big pleasure craft sat an old man and a young girl. They were attired in the ordinary costume of the better class of Chinese.

The old man was now in the act of getting upon his feet, and in fair English he shouted out to the fugitives:

"Run down the dock, and stand on the end. You can jump into the boat as we pass by."

"All right," shouted back Harry Hale, and to his companion he said: "Run for your life, Mr. Morton."

The people they had knocked flying with their football rush were now upon their feet and after them again, more infuriated than ever, and shrieking aloud for the lives of the foreign beasts who had dared to step upon the tail of a sacred dog. Moreover, they had picked up stones and sticks from the street and were beginning to hurl them.

The two Americans recognized their danger, and knew that they would be murdered by the fanatical mob if overtaken, and they pressed their elbows to their sides and ran like tanbark sprinters.

After them rushed the shrieking crowd of Chinamen, exciting one another to further efforts by their cries, and when half the distance down the long dock had been covered and the fugitives were still in the lead, one of the pursuers uttered a peculiar cry and drew a long knife from his clothing.

"Look out!"

It was the clear voice of the young girl in the boat that reached their ears, and although they did not dare to come to a halt with that raving crowd of fanatics behind them, both of the fugitives managed to turn their heads in one swift glance, and caught sight of the man with the knife. Like many of the Chinese and neighboring nations, the fellow was expert in throwing the weapon, and this he was in the act of doing as the two Americans twisted their heads in that brief backward look.

The eastern experts can throw knives with deadly accuracy, and had it not been for the girl's warning cry and the hasty backward glance it is safe to say that either one of the fugitives would have been pierced in the back by the keen blade, but they both twisted aside without stopping, and the knife hummed fairly between them and flew far out over the water before it disappeared in the Yang-tse-Kiang.

On dashed the two Americans, and the oarsmen in the big pleasure craft pulled with steady and powerful strokes for the end of the dock, aiming to reach it at the same time that Harry and Morton got there.

Whish!

A shower of stones came hurtling through the air, and some of them struck Harry and Morton on the body, but although they felt the pain of the blows they did not slacken their speed.

Another shower of stones came whistling along, but not one of them hit the flying marks, and with a great final burst of speed the fugitives reached the end of the dock, and so well had the oarsmen timed their strokes that the boat was just passing, about two feet distant.

"Jump!" commanded the man in the boat, and the two Americans calculated the distance with their eyes, made the leap, and landed safely in the bottom of the large pleasure craft, which rocked slightly for an instant, and then rode evenly on the water, while the voice of the owner commanded the oarsmen to give way.

The two Americans were saved.

CHAPTER II.

LOST IN THE HEART OF CHINA.

Away darted the pleasure boat from the end of the dock, and as a last move the infuriated pursuers hurled sticks and stones after it, some of the missiles striking the occupants of the craft, but doing little damage.

When fully out of range of the defeated mob, Harry Hale turned to regard the old man and the young girl who had called out to him and Morton.

The man looked like what he was, a prosperous merchant, with a handsome face of the cast commonly found in Thibet, but the girl was so remarkable in her surroundings that Harry could not help staring hard at her. She

was very fair, as, indeed, many of the upper-class Thibetans are, and with the exception of a very little upturning to the eyes, was as little like a Chinese girl as can be imagined. She was decidedly pretty, and it is possible that the slight Chinese slant to her eyes only added to her charms. Certainly, with her big, blue eyes, her fair, smooth skin, her peachy-tinted cheeks and her full, red lips, she made a most inviting picture, and the good-looking Yankee boy stared at her until she blushed.

Then Harry turned to the old man and said in grateful tones:

"My companion and myself have to thank you for saving our lives from that infuriated mob. The least that could have happened to us would have been broken bones. My name is Harry Hale, and this is my employer, Mr. Morton."

"My name is Sem Buen, and I am a merchant in this town," said the old man, bowing in turn to the boy and the man, "and this is my daughter, Du Toy."

Harry and Morton bowed to the pretty girl, and Du Toy returned it.

"I can hardly believe that you are a Chinese girl," said Harry, speaking in the language of the country. "Was your mother a Chinese woman?"

"Yes, but of a very high grade," was the reply. "Where did you learn to speak our language so perfectly?"

The young secretary told her, and then the old merchant broke in with an inquiry into the cause of the trouble that had so nearly resulted seriously for the two Americans. While Harry was making this known to him the boat was gliding rapidly along, and soon turned into a channel that conducted it to a dock that ran out from a handsome garden.

"You committed one of the most serious crimes in their eyes," spoke up the girl. "Of course, it may sound strange to you to hear me speak like this, but we are Christians, and there are quite a number of our neighbors who have been converted to Christianity."

"Now I can understand why you rescued us," said the boy, and at that minute the boat touched the small dock, and Harry sprang nimbly out and gave his hand to Du Toy.

She accepted his aid with a sweet smile, and Harry felt his heart go pit-pat under his vest when he held her tiny hand.

"We are very grateful to you for all your kindness,"

spoke up Mr. Morton, as he stepped ashore, "and if you will be good enough to show us the way to the street we will trouble you no further."

"Don't say that," responded Sem Buen. "I am a lonely old man, and it will afford me much pleasure to have your company for a few hours. I have made two trips to your country, and have stayed a couple of years each time, and now that I have the chance to talk to two Americans I am not going to miss it. If you really feel grateful to me and my daughter, you will stay a few hours with us, and tell us the news from the United States."

And that is how the two Americans found themselves sitting in cool and spacious rooms a little later, eating and drinking and conversing. Harry asked Du Toy if she could sing or play, and she answered that she could do a little of both, and then she made both him and Morton feel a little homesick as well as surprised, by producing a banjo, on which she played a clever accompaniment while she sang a song that had been popular in the United States four or five years before.

The two visitors were handsomely entertained, and when they left for their lodging at a late hour, it was with the understanding that they would call on the following morning, and delight the old merchant with another conversation about the country he had twice visited. When Du Toy parted with Harry Hale she held his hand a very long time, and then released it with a blush, as though unconscious of what she had been doing, and the boy walked along for several minutes after leaving the house with his head on his chest, until the laughter of his companion aroused him from his dreams.

Then the boy looked up with a rather foolish grin on his face.

"Rather hard hit, Harry?" smilingly asked Morton.

"Why, Mr. Morton, I hardly know the girl."

His employer laughed merrily.

"I didn't say anything about a girl," he said, with a mischievous glance at his young companion. "However, Chinese or not, I must say that she is one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen, and if you do admire her it only shows that you have good taste. Moreover, I understand that Sem Buen, who is a widower, is wealthy, and that she is his only child, so whoever marries her will get both beauty and money."

"I am only a seventeen-year-old boy, Mr. Morton," responded Harry.

"That is true," smilingly said Morton, "and you are too young for me to talk to about such matters, but you are a manly boy, Harry, and there is no telling what may happen yet."

They reached their lodgings at that moment, and ten minutes later they were in bed, and although Harry Hale went to sleep as promptly as one of his years and good health might be expected to do, he was dreaming all night of a pretty girl with big, blue eyes, peachy cheeks, and pouting red lips, who held his hand a very long time.

In the morning Harry made a very careful toilet, and had to put on every one of his neckties before he found one that perfectly satisfied him. Then, with Morton at his side, he set out for the residence of Sem Buen.

As they approached the home of the Bathang merchant Morton was chaffing Harry about Du Toy, when the young fellow, who had very sharp hearing, suddenly held up his hand.

"What is that?" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I hear the sound of grief. I can hear a man giving vent to his grief in Chinese," earnestly said the boy. "There; now you can hear it plainly, and it is the voice of our host of last night."

And, sure enough, Morton now plainly heard the voice of the Bathang merchant raised in sorrow.

"Had we better turn back?" he asked.

"No," decidedly said Harry.

"But we cannot intrude on his sorrow."

"We can at least learn what the cause of it is. Then, if we can neither assist nor advise him, we can go on our way."

"Well, you understand these people better than I do," said Morton, and then he and Harry entered the house.

Sem Buen was sitting in a large room surrounded with sorrowful-faced servants, and the tears were streaming from his eyes. When he saw the two Americans he got upon his feet, and came towards them.

After Hale and Morton came the Chinese body servant employed by the latter, a shrewd, crafty, but faithful fellow named Wun Ki, whom he had picked up in New York and employed to come to China with him.

Overwhelmed with grief, the merchant could barely say:

"She is lost!"

"Who is lost?" demanded the boy.

"Du Toy."

"Since when?"

"Since early morning, or, perhaps, since late last night."

"What do you mean by lost?"

"That she has disappeared."

"Did she go to bed?"

"Yes, immediately after you left, and this morning, at an early hour, the maid who took the water to her room for her bath found the room empty. She at once notified me, and as my daughter never leaves her room until I call for her to breakfast with me, I at once caused a search to be made for her. She was not to be seen in the house or the grounds, and then I sent out a crier through the town, offering a reward in every street for tidings of her, but not a soul has seen her. I have had to do this two or three times before, because she has now and then walked in her sleep, but the offer of the reward has always resulted in some person bringing her back to me within an hour, but now she has been gone for hours, and nobody has seen her. Besides, she has not walked in her sleep for over a year, and I think she is cured of the habit. No, my friends, she is lost in the heart of China, and you Americans cannot understand what a terrible thing that is."

And he shuddered with horror.

"What do you think has happened to her?" asked Harry Hale.

"Ah, if I could even guess, it would be a relief to me," answered the unhappy father, "but here in all parts of China we are surrounded with secret societies who have ceremonies that are too horrible to mention, and for some of the ceremonies they kill innocent young girls. Now, can you understand my horror?"

Harry Hale grew cold with a creepy sensation as he heard these words from the father of the pretty Du Toy, and he was about to question him further when he caught the keen, slanting eyes of the servant, Wun Ki.

The latter had been peering out of the window, and looking keenly at the front of the house, and now he nodded slightly to the secretary, and Harry went up to him.

"Hally," said Wun Ki, speaking in the Pidgin English that was the best at his command, "you know me reg'lar Chinaman, go joss house, allee samee likee do in Dloyer stleet, savvy?"

"Yes."

"Wellee, this morn'ing, 'bout daylight, mebbe little 'fore, me plasse here on way to joss house to burn stick."

"You passed here early this morning on your way to the joss house? Did you see anything?"

"Yes; me see servant talking at glate with man on horse, and me no see dat fiellar now."

"Oh, you saw a man you took to be a servant talking to a man on horseback and you don't see that servant now. That is something, but did you hear what was said?"

"No."

"What did the horseman look like?"

"Only see velly long cloak."

"Is that all you know?"

"Yes," responded Wun Ki, "but where other fiellar?"

"We'll find out," said Harry, who thought the matter well worth looking into, and he turned to Sem Buen.

In a few words he made the merchant acquainted with what Wun Ki had told him, and Sem Buen pulled himself together and looked around the room.

"Where is Foo Chow?" he asked.

One of the servants stepped forward, and said that Foo Chow was in an outhouse, drunk, and Sem Buen at once ordered two of his menials to bring the man before him. They departed at once, and came back in a few minutes, dragging in a half-intoxicated servant who held a half-empty bottle close to his breast and leered at everybody with a grin that was half fear and half anger. The instant the sharp-eyed Wun Ki caught sight of the bottle, he turned to Harry and whispered in his ear:

"He dinkee Spanish wine, costee fifteen yuen blottle."

The young secretary understood the meaning of Wun Ki's words at once for he knew, himself, that the imported Spanish wine which the intoxicated man hugged to his breast could not be bought in any part of China for less than fifteen dollars a bottle, and that a common servant should be drinking it, and, in fact, had drank enough of the costly stuff to make him reel as he walked, was certainly suspicious. He formed his plan of action at once and turned to the master of the house.

"Sem Buen," he said, "will you let me do as I want with this man?"

"Yes," eagerly assented the distracted father, and without more ado the boy shot out his hand, caught the servant by the throat, clutched him with a firm grip, and said:

"Foo Chow, I know that you are drunk on the high-priced wine bought with the money paid to you by the man on horseback who was talking to you this morning before"

daylight, and unless you tell me the truth, and at once, I have your master's permission to strangle you to death. Now, speak. Where is Du Toy?"

Foo Chow looked up into the blazing eyes of the powerful young American who clutched him by the throat, and what he read there not only half-sobered him, but also shook his very soul with terror.

"Speak!"

Harry Hale's voice was not loud, but there was a sound in his tones that made Foo Chow turn green under his yellow skin.

"The man on horseback took her away," he sullenly said, in tones as loud as the grip on his throat permitted, and then Harry let go his hold.

CHAPTER III.

DU TOY ABDUCTED BY THE GRAND LAMA.

The Yankee boy turned to the merchant.

"You have heard what the rascal says," he said to Sem Buen, "and as you have the power of life and death over him, it remains with you to find out all he knows about the abduction of your daughter."

The merchant at once took up the questioning, and Foo Chow, under threat of death, told how the man on the horse had seen him cleaning the doorstep in the early morning and had offered him a large sum of money to point out the way to the bed-room of Du Toy. Then, he said, the man had got down from his horse, had entered the girl's room, and had come out a few minutes later with the girl over his arm like a bundle, and Du Toy did not move, so he thought that she was either dead or drugged.

That, he said, was all he knew, except that the horseman rode away on the road to the west, and that he was joined by some other mounted men when he was about a quarter of a mile from the house.

Sharp-eyed Wun Ki had kept his gaze fixed on the man while he was speaking, and when he came to the end of his recital, the shrewd fellow edged up to the boy and said:

"Dlat fiellar clountlyman o' mine, and I tellee you dlat he lie. He slay he dlon't know more, and he lie."

Harry had great confidence in the shrewdness of Wun Ki, and he at once turned to the unfaithful servant.

"Foo Chow," he said, stretching forth his hand in a very suggestive way, "I want you to tell me what you are keeping back, or else I'll choke you until you confess or else until you're dead. Quick! out with it."

Foo Chow hesitated for a moment, saw that powerful hand advancing towards his throat, and blurted out:

"I heard the horseman say that the Grand Lama would give him a rich reward for the prize."

At these words Sem Buen fell senseless to the floor.

When he was revived the boy spoke to him, and asked him what was the cause of his extreme terror.

"Why," he said, tremblingly, "if it is true that my daughter is in the hands of the Grand Lama, then she is, indeed, lost to me, for how shall I ever be able to rescue her? He is mightier than all the nobility of the country, and although the soldiers are supposed to be in command of every province in Thibet, and the allegiance is nominally to the Emperor, the real ruler in this country is the Grand Lama, and I could sooner hope to penetrate to the royal palace than to effect an entrance to the Grand Lamasary."

"What can they want of the girl?"

"That is a mystery."

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing; I am helpless."

"Well, I'm not," energetically said Harry Hale. "I'm a Yankee boy, and my people are not in the habit of sitting down and tamely submitting to misfortune, so if you will aid me in the way I think will be helpful, I'll start out with the resolution to follow your daughter and her captors, and if it is necessary to penetrate to the Grand Lamasary to learn the secret motive of this abduction, I am going to do it."

"You will?" cried the father.

"I will."

"But you are a mere boy."

"Yes, but I'm a Yankee boy, and that counts for a good deal when it comes to business like this."

"What help do you want from me?"

"How do I travel to Lassa, the home of the Grand Lama?"

"With horses."

"Have you got them?"

"I have the finest to be found for a thousand miles."

"Then I want them, and there should be no delay in getting them ready for the start."

"They shall be ready within a few minutes, and I will have little sacks of gold to put in your hands, that you may not lack for its influence when gold can serve you."

"That is all right," said the boy, and then he turned to his employer and said: "how about you in this matter, Mr. Morton?"

"I'm with you to the last of it, whatever that may be," heartily returned Morton. "This man saved me from the mob, and I'm going to try to help you rescue his daughter. But you have failed to find out from Foo Chow how many horsemen were in the party that carried the girl off."

Harry turned to the servant, and the fellow said that he thought there were four or five in the party, and that they were Tartars.

"Sem Buen," said Harry Hale, turning to the bereaved merchant, "we must now go to our lodgings and get a few things to take with us, and when we return we shall be ready to start in pursuit. How many fleet horses have you?"

"Two."

"Just enough for Mr. Morton and me. Do you intend to come after us?"

"Yes; I will hastily fit out a trading caravan, and follow you as swiftly as possible, so as to be near at hand if the pursuit lasts all the way to the city of Lassa, and help you in any way I can."

"Then you had better bring our servant, Wun Ki, with you."

The merchant said he would do so, and then the two Americans hurried away to their lodgings, hastily made up a small bundle of necessary articles and then carefully examined and loaded four revolvers that they possessed between them.

Harry also took what appeared to be an ordinary flute, except that it was somewhat longer and thicker than most musical instruments of its kind. This he thrust inside his breast, remarking:

"A little music sometimes helps to pass the time away."

Morton grinned, but said nothing, and a few minutes later he and the Yankee boy left the house. When they arrived at the residence of Sem Buen they saw two magnificent horses, one as white as milk and the other as black as could be, standing in charge of a groom, and while they were admiring the exquisite animals the merchant appeared.

"They are the two swiftest horses in Thibet," he said,

"and they are called Midnight and Morning. They can travel fifty miles without rest, and if you are in danger from numbers they will save you by their wonderful speed. Here is the gold in little sacks, and I have more if needed."

Harry and Morton stowed away the gold in various places, and then said farewell to Sem Buen, and started off, the boy riding the coal-black steed known by the name of Midnight.

The horses were spirited animals, but the Americans were both good riders, and when the animals felt the touch of a master hand, they were very easily controlled. With a long, easy gallop that rapidly ate up the miles, the two horses dashed off to the west.

"Harry," said Morton, "how do you expect to effect an entrance to the palace of the Grand Lama?"

"To tell you the truth," answered the boy, "I hadn't given the matter even a thought, for with two such horses as we are riding we should be able to overtake the abductors of the girl long before they reach Lassa, but if we don't rescue her before that then I shall have to be guided by whatever turns up to suggest a plan."

"You would be taking your life in your hands."

"We are both doing that now, when we are following the paid villains of the Grand Lama with the idea of rescuing Du Toy."

"That is true," admitted Morton, and then they both relapsed into silence and sped thoughtfully on their way. An hour later they came to a small village and as there were two roads leading out of it, they concluded to draw rein and ask a few questions.

A man who wore the garb of a laborer stood near them when they pulled up and Harry at once addressed him, asking if he had seen a party of four or five horsemen pass that way during the morning, and having a young girl in their party.

The countryman at once said that he had seen the party about three hours or so previously, and that they had taken the broad road that ran to the city of Lassa.

Harry gave him a small piece of money for his information, and at that instant caught sight of another man, also dressed as a common laborer, who had evidently stood within earshot while he was talking, and who now emerged from a little shed a few feet away, leading a horse which he at once mounted and rode swiftly towards Lassa.

The boy was a fair judge of horseflesh, and it struck him as rather peculiar that a man dressed as a common

laborer should be mounted on a stallion that Harry decided was worth five hundred yuen, and he gazed thoughtfully after him.

"I don't like the looks of matters," he said to Morton, as they started on their way again. "It appears to me that this thing has been very carefully planned out, with spies and scouts scattered along the road to look out for any pursuit, and I tell you that we must be watching out for danger every foot of the way. Have your guns ready to pull and fire on short notice, Mr. Morton, for I suspect that we are not to be permitted to travel very far without hearing from the abductors of Du Toy."

Morton agreed with him, and they went on their way looking sharply for danger from all quarters.

With a long, easy gallop that they could be depended upon to keep up for many miles, the black horse and his white mate strode on for another half hour, when, just as they reached the crest of a small hill, there came a startling interruption.

A few hundred feet below them, and a little to the right of the road, was a small cluster of stunted trees, and from this little patch of woodland came puffs of smoke, followed instantly by the reports of firearms.

Harry Hale became conscious of a burning sensation in his right side, and Morton uttered a sharp exclamation.

Both felt that they had been hit, but neither one even so much as reeled, and the same instinctive idea caused them both to draw their revolvers.

It was Harry who quickly made up his mind what to do, and who gave the order for the next move.

The thin smoke still hung in the light air, indicating where the murderous shots had come from.

"Fire below the smoke," shouted Harry to his companion, and at the same instant discharged his self-acting weapon three times in rapid succession, and moved it slightly up and down with each discharge in order to cover quite a range, and had the pleasure of seeing a man leap from the concealing trees, utter a yell, and fall on his face.

This brought three more men from their hiding-place.

Each man held the bridle of a horse in his hand, and when they saw the two Americans dashing towards them with pistols in their hands, one of them uttered a command, they all leaped upon their horses with the ease and grace of the desert riders, and dashed away waving their long rifles in the air, and shouting out unintelligible cries,

while a riderless horse, evidently the one lately ridden by the fellow Harry had brought down with his chance shot, dashed after them.

"After them!" yelled Morton, whose fighting blood was up.

"Stop!" said the boy, and laid a restraining hand upon the bridle of his employer's horse. "We may follow them into another ambushade, and not get off so luckily next time."

"True," admitted Morton, and then they both stopped and took account of their condition.

"I'm hit, but I don't think it amounts to much," said Harry, and then he took off his clothing and examined his right side, finding that a bullet had scraped its way across his ribs, merely burning the skin in its passage. Morton had a slight graze on one cheek, and from the tip of one ear a few drops of blood were oozing, showing where a bullet had come within an inch of splitting his skull.

"They were close shaves, after all," said Harry, as he resumed his clothing and put a small patch of plaster on Morton's bleeding ear, "and if the rascals had been better shots they would have finished our work for us. Now let us see the fellow I tumbled over by chance."

They rode forward to where the man lay face down on the ground near the little grove, and Harry turned him over with his foot. He was stone dead, his rifle still tightly clenched in one hand, and a most murderous expression on his face.

"Oho!" cried the boy, as he gazed down on the still form. "This one was not a member of that little gang of murderers, but more likely was directing the business. They, you probably noticed, wore short tunics, and this man wears the long robe of a priest. From what I have read I am inclined to think that he is one of the household of the Grand Lama, and these marks on the front of his robe positively say that he is attached to the temple, so it is safe to say that he represents the head of the order."

"Then," said Morton, "if all these precautions are taken to insure Du Toy coming safely to the home of the Grand Lama, it is proof positive that she is a captive of great importance to them. What can be the secret back of all this, Harry?"

"I don't know," answered the boy, still looking down reflectively upon the still form of the dead priest, "but unless we are fortunate enough to rescue Du Toy before they

get her to Lassa, I am going to make it my business to find out."

As he stood looking at the dress of the dead priest, an idea came into the boy's head, and bending down he began to remove the garments from the fast stiffening body.

"What's the idea?" asked Morton.

"I may want to get into the headquarters of the sect, and this costume might enable me to do it," answered Harry.

He removed the clothing from the dead man, taking even the round hat that had fallen from his head, and made them into a small bundle. Then he and Morton once more took the road to Lassa.

"There is hardly any doubt that the pretended laborer who rode away on that valuable horse was a spy, and that he warned that little gang of murderers of our coming," said Harry as they dashed along the road, "and we must expect to encounter danger at every turning, and be constantly on the lookout for shots from ambush."

"But," said Morton, "those villains rode away to the north, and we are traveling west. How can any other bodies of men in the employ of the Grand Lama know of our coming?"

"I don't know," answered Harry, "but you can be sure that these people are in possession of some method of communicating news at a distance, and although they have no telegraph or telephone, you may be sure that they know a way to talk to one another over many miles of space."

It was a bright morning, and the sunshine was streaming down upon the level plain over which they were riding.

Suddenly Harry was almost blinded by a flash of light that struck upon his eyes.

It was gone in an instant, and Harry looked up.

The boy saw it flash on a small pool of water a few hundred feet away, and then, watching keenly, he saw the glancing light touch again and again on such polished surfaces as could reflect it, and he at once realized what it was that had momentarily blinded him.

From some elevated place behind them, probably from some low peak of the Himalayas, a mirror was being used to telegraph information to some parties who were, perhaps, miles ahead of them, and Harry did not doubt that it was being done in connection with the abduction and the pursuit.

"Did you see the signal light?" he asked Morton.

"Yes, I did, and I suppose it is informing some more of the villains of what has taken place."

"Without doubt, and instructing them to finish us when we come within the range of their guns," grimly said Harry, and he drew forth his revolvers and looked them carefully over. "What is that ahead?"

"It looks like a small caravan."

"That's what it is, and we'll ask them if they've seen the party we are after."

In a few minutes they had overtaken a little caravan, and Harry pulled up alongside the leading wagon and spoke to the driver.

The latter stared at him when Harry addressed him in excellent Chinese, but answered respectfully that such a party as the boy spoke of had passed them and had then turned off to the right, taking the road to the town of Wango.

"That's surprising," muttered the boy to himself. "Then they are not on the way to Lassa after all, and it may only be an abduction by Tartar robbers for the sake of ransom."

He thanked the driver, told the information to Morton, and they wheeled their horses and started on the back track. Then an idea occurred to the boy, and he turned swiftly in the saddle and surprised a grin on the face of the driver of the yaks.

In an instant Harry Hale was off his horse, and had run to the front of the cart. With a single bound he was up on the wheel of the cart, and with a sure hand had the grinning driver by the throat.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VILLAINOUS LANDLORD.

Harry Hale had acted with such rapidity that the driver had no chance to defend himself from the boy's attack. The fellow was just in the act of swinging the long lash over the backs of the toiling yaks when the powerful fingers of the active Yankee boy closed down on his throat.

Instantly there was an outcry from the balance of the party, and some members of the caravan pressed forward, evidently with the idea of assisting the astonished driver, but Morton, readily comprehending that Harry had some

well-defined idea in making the move, at once drew his revolvers and covered those who were running to the driver's aid, and they came to a halt with such suddenness that they fell over one another.

Harry looked into the eyes of the driver, and saw that the man was badly frightened.

The boy held him just tight enough to prevent him from getting away, and in a low, tense voice said:

"When I turned away you permitted yourself to grin, thinking you had completely fooled the foreign beasts, but you grinned a trifle too soon, and if you hesitate one instant in telling me the truth I'll choke you to death and throw your body to the dogs. Did you see the party with the girl?"

"Yes."

"How long ago?"

"About two hours."

"Which way did they go?"

"Towards Lassa."

"Did they halt?"

"No."

"Then they did not tell you to give me wrong information about their route?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"I got it from the hills."

"By mirror signals?"

"Yes."

"What did the signals say?"

"That if two horsemen asked about the party that passed with the girl, I was to say they went north."

"What else?"

"Nothing."

Harry Hale looked searchingly into the eyes of the driver, and made up his mind that the fellow was telling the truth, but he did not immediately release his hold.

"Why are they taking the girl to Lassa?" he asked.

"If my life must pay for my ignorance," gasped the driver, "then I am a dead man."

"I will fill your hands with gold if you tell me."

"If you could give me the gold and jewels of the world I could not tell you," was the reply, and Harry felt that the driver was telling the truth. He released the fellow, drew his own pistols to reinforce the threatening attitude taken by Morton, and sternly ordered the caravan to proceed.

Then he mounted to his black steed, and he and Morton flew past the wagons as they slowly toiled on their way.

"We are evidently face to face with a carefully planned bit of work," said the boy as they flew swiftly over the road towards Lassa, "and we must be on the outlook for danger at every turn and crossing. Our enemies have expected pursuit, and have planned ways and means of meeting and defeating it, and as we are two and they are many, it will take all the wit we possess to keep out of danger."

"If it is true that the Grand Lama is at the back of this," said Morton, "then it is a sure thing that no money will be spared to carry it out successfully. I would give a little to know the secret that lies at the bottom of the abduction of Du Toy."

"I shall find it out," confidently said the boy, and then they came to a hill and slackened their speed somewhat in order not to wind their too willing horses.

When they reached the top of the hill they saw another trading caravan below them, and Harry made up his mind to question some of the drivers in order to get an idea of the distance that the other party was in advance of them.

He dashed up to the head driver, and asked his question, and the man at once said that he had seen the Tartar riders with the young girl in their midst, and that they were fully two hours in advance, had procured fresh horses, and were riding like the wind.

Something in the man's manner made Harry look closely at him, and he made out a small cross just peeping from the edge of the mantle that the driver wore.

"Are you a Christian?" the boy asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "I was converted about five years ago."

"I am glad to hear it," said Harry, and then he told him of the abduction of Du Toy, and the suspicion that she was being taken to the palace of the Grand Lama for some secret purpose.

"There is no doubt of it," said the Christian driver, "for I know the face of the Tartar robber who heads the men who stole her from her father's house, and I know that he has more than once been employed by the Grand Lama for some purpose that could not be undertaken by the priests."

"But what do you think they want with Du Toy?" asked Harry.

The driver shook his head.

"How should I know? but Heaven help her when once she passes into the hand of the Grand Lama!"

Fully satisfied now that the girl was, indeed, bound for Lassa and for the palace of the Grand Lama, Harry turned away and continued his journey, and in silence the plucky young Yankee resolved that he would rescue the beautiful Du Toy if he had to penetrate to the presence of the Grand Lama himself, and tear the unhappy girl from his clutches.

Morton glanced up at the sky, and saw that it was near noon.

"Harry," he said, "we have been going since early morning, and I must confess that my stomach is talking to me. I don't fight well on an empty stomach, and we are liable to have lively work at any time, and, besides, these horses would be all the better for a long journey if they were rested and fed."

"That is true," admitted Harry, "so we will pull up at the next village and look after our horses and ourselves. We have only these animals to depend upon and as our foes are many miles in advance of us and Lassa a long distance away, it will be sensible on our part to give the stallions a chance."

At a long, easy gallop they sped on, and a little later came to a small village, in the center of which Harry saw a small building decorated with a sign that indicated that it was a place of public refreshment. In front of the door were half-a-dozen carts with either goats or yaks attached, and the drivers could be seen inside the main room of the tavern eating and drinking.

When the two Americans pulled up at this place, the landlord ran out with smiling face, bowing to the ground, and at once called aloud for boys to take the horses of the gentlemen. Then he made signs for the Americans to alight, and indicated that he could give them something to eat.

"Don't utter a word in his language," said Harry to Morton, "because by pretending that we don't understand it we may overhear something that will be to our advantage."

"That's right enough," assented Morton, and then he and Harry got down from their horses, which were at once led away, the boy making signs to the landlord that the animals should be fed when they were a little cooler. The host signed that he understood, and then conducted them into a small room at the side of the main room, and seated them at a table. Then he walked to where a slid-

ing door communicated with another room, called loudly for the cook, and when the latter answered him the landlord shouted out that the place was honored with the custom of two foreign gentlemen who were evidently persons of great wealth and consequence, and that as they could not speak Chinese it was impossible to get their order for dinner, but that the cook was to get up for them the grandest meal he could invent.

"That sounds pretty good to a hungry man," smilingly remarked Morton as he listened to the landlord. "They can't make it any too grand for the condition of my appetite at the present time."

"Still," said Harry, "we can't afford to devote too much time to a meal, Mr. Morton," and at that instant a sudden suspicion entered his mind.

Was it possible that the landlord was playing a part?

Somehow, it seemed to Harry, the host was just a trifle too eager to please his unknown guests.

He turned to his companion.

"Mr. Morton, is that fellow acting a part?"

Morton was almost too much surprised at the question to answer, but he knew that Harry was a very shrewd boy, and he thought deeply for a minute.

"If he is," he said, "then he is certainly overdoing it, for he has aroused your suspicions. What makes you suspicious?"

"He is too eager to get up an expensive dinner for two strangers whose sole claim to consideration is a pair of good horses that would enable them to get safely away without paying him."

"By Jove," exclaimed Morton, "I am half inclined to think you are right, Harry, and if so, what are we to do?"

Before answering, Harry Hale turned around in his chair and strode across the room to where a small window looked out upon the stable yard. There was a heavy curtain of silk across the window, and it was secured in such a manner as to prevent anyone from looking out, but without a moment's hesitation the boy tore it from its fastenings and looked out.

Directly opposite him was the stable, the door of which was open, so that he could see fairly within the structure, which was low, broad, and well lighted from above.

He was just in time to see one of the stable boys who had taken the horses from him and Morton, approaching the stalls where the two animals were secured, holding a

pail in either hand that was filled to the brim with something, the boy could not see what.

"Look!" cried Harry, pointing the boy out to Morton, who had crossed the room to his side. "There is treachery at once, for even if that is only ordinary feed in those pails and not some doctored stuff, our horses would be foundered if fed and watered while hot. We must be quick."

To think, with Harry, was to act.

He found the catch of the window, threw it back, opened it without making any noise, and leaped through the opening.

The instant he landed on the ground he drew from his inner pocket the long and thick flute that Morton had joked about.

It really was a flute, that is, it could be played upon and was really a very sweet-toned instrument, but the flute part was very short, and the rest of it was made of tough hide of a bull, and contained a short, heavy bar of steel.

With this innocent-looking weapon in his hand the boy ran to the stable and reached the open doorway just as the stable boy was about to lift one of the pails of food to the manger. Harry caught his eye at that moment and the boy came to a standstill with the uplifted pail in his hand, looking like a yellow statue.

The expression on the boy's face, and the rigid attitude of alarm were quite enough for Harry. He was convinced in his heart that only the fact that the stable boy had been detected in the commission of a crime would account for his evident terror, and he acted with his usual promptness.

"Treachery, Mr. Morton, treachery," he cried, loud enough for his companion to hear him, and then he lifted the flute on high and leaped toward the startled stable boy.

The latter dropped the pails and uttered a cry that Harry checked with a swift blow of the flute, and the treacherous young Chinaman sank unconscious to the stable floor. Slight as the sound uttered by the boy had been, however, it had been heard, for orders were shouted out from within the tavern, and more than a score of voices were heard.

"Lively!" cried Harry, and then he seized the two bridles, ran the horses out of the stable, and he and Morton threw themselves into the saddles just as the landlord came running around the corner of the tavern, followed by not less than a score of people.

"Kill the foreign beasts!"

That was the cry that went up.

Harry Hale cast a quick glance at the mob, and noted that they bore no weapons.

"Charge through them," he said, turning quickly to Morton. "Ride them down and then away on our road. Go!"

Side by side they charged the yelling crowd, scattering them right and left with an irresistible dash, and then, with shrieks and groans ringing in their ears, the two Americans sped on their way.

CHAPTER V.

THE DRUGGED COFFEE.

Their horses were refreshed by the rest they had enjoyed, and flew over the road at a rapid gallop, while the sounds of chagrin and rage in their rear grew rapidly fainter.

Harry turned in his saddle once and cast a swift glance behind him, but there were no indications of pursuit. In fact, the counter move of the clever Yankee boy had been made with such unexpected suddenness, that the plotting Chinamen were taken wholly by surprise, and before any attempt at following the Americans could be made, the black and white stallions were nearly out of sight.

For over a quarter of an hour they dashed on with that long, swinging gallop that covered the ground so easily and so swiftly, and then they brought the horses down to a gentle canter and wiped their faces.

"Lively work," said Harry.

"Decidedly so," responded Morton, "and very hungry work, too. I must say I was never more reluctant to leave a meal in my life."

"And before we had finished it our horses would have been ruined," said the boy. "To feed and water them when they were steaming hot was bad enough, but I am inclined to think that there was something in those pails that would have put them out of business for more than one day. The expression on that stable boy's face was enough to convince me that our horses were to have been poisoned, and without them where would we be?"

"I suppose I'll get a meal sooner or later," said Morton, who was a very good feeder and didn't like to be deprived of a dinner. "What do you propose to do next, Harry?"

Harry did not answer for a moment, for at that instant they came to where the road branched.

One was the main traveled road that led to Lassa, and the other, a much narrower and evidently less important road, went to parts that to Harry were unknown.

The boy thought deeply for a minute, and then made up his mind what course to pursue.

"Mr. Morton," he said, "these horses are our only reliable means of reaching Lassa, if we are compelled to go that far, or of overtaking the Tartars who have run off with Du Toy. We are both hungry, and the horses, who have carried us many miles, must be equally so. We cannot be in condition to fight unless we eat, and we cannot expect the horses to carry us much further at speed unless they are fed, and as the highway seems a dangerous place for us and the nags, I propose that we turn off here on this side road and follow it until we come to some place where food for all can be had. Then we can go on our way, and make good time, too."

"A good idea," assented Morton. "For that matter, I would wager that the Tartars in advance of us, if they are aware of the schemes that have been hatched up for our benefit, are saying to themselves that they need no longer fear any pursuit on our part, confident that either we or our horses are done for, and are taking it easy, but for all that we had better do as you say and take no further chances with this highway to Lassa."

So they loped along at an easy gait for a short mile, and then came upon a tiny village that held but half-a-dozen houses, and yet boasted of a small tavern.

There was a crossbar set up on two uprights in front of the door of this little country inn, and it was evident to Harry that it served as a hitching post for horses. In front of the doorway, sitting on a stool, his eyes closed, and deep snores coming from his flat nostrils, was a Chinaman of middle age, whom Harry took to be the landlord.

The two Americans alighted from their horses, and tied the beasts to the hitching posts.

"I don't intend to let the horses go out of my sight," said Harry.

"I don't blame you," said Morton, and then they approached the sleeper and shook him gently by the arm.

He woke up, rubbed his eyes, and looked in some astonishment at the two Americans who stood before him.

"He is wondering how he is going to talk with us," smilingly said Harry to Morton, and then he addressed the

man in his excellent Chinese, and asked him if he were the landlord.

The man replied that he was, and asked what he could do for them, adding that he did not have much food or drink in the house.

"What you have will do for us," said the boy, rather pleased at the man's civil manner, and then he led the way into the little tavern, saying that the horses would have to cool off before they could be fed.

The place into which Harry walked was clean, and so, also, was the table that stood about five feet from the door. A white cloth was spread over it, and a few small rolls reposed upon a plate.

"Order some coffee right away," requested Morton. "A good cup of coffee will make me feel like a new man. You are a breakfast eater, Harry, and you can travel on your first meal, but I take only a cup of coffee in the morning and in two hours or so I'm starved."

The boy gave the order to the landlord, and the latter said that coffee was ready and would be served at once.

He went out of the room, and returned at once with two steaming cups of coffee in his hands. Setting these down on the table, he rapidly named the list of foods at his command, and asked the gentlemen to give their order and it should be cooked at once.

"You give the order while I'm putting this away," said Morton to Harry, and lifting the coffee to his lips he began to sip it, saying, between gulps, that if the rest of the meal proved to be half as good, there would be no reason for complaint.

Harry Hale gave the order for the meal, meanwhile keeping one eye on the horses, for he felt that without the black and white stallions to aid them, the pursuit of Du Toy would have to be abandoned.

Three or four men came strolling along, and seated themselves on the bench outside the door. Harry listened to their conversation, thinking that he might hear something to his advantage, and when he heard one of them say something about Tartars he listened very intently.

Morton finished the cup of coffee with a long sigh of satisfaction, and leaned back in his chair contentedly.

Harry did not care for coffee except after a meal, so he permitted his cup to stand in front of him while paying strict attention to the conversation of the men on the bench at the door.

After the first few words they had lowered their voices,

and the boy found it hard to catch more than a word here and there.

He heard the landlord clattering around the kitchen, and resolved to creep nearer to the door and hear the conversation. He moved silently away, and took up a position near the doorway.

Even as he did so the men who had been speaking outside, as though they had heard him coming, arose from the bench and walked away.

As he turned back towards the table he saw a sight that for a moment was enough to chill his young blood.

Morton had arisen, and was standing nearly erect, clutching his chair and gazing around the room with a bewildered expression that told the boy a story without words.

He could see that his employer was bewildered, and that he was struggling to shake off the effects of something that was benumbing his faculties, and the truth at once rushed across the keen mind of the boy.

Morton had been all right before he drank the coffee, and so it was a sure enough deduction that the coffee was drugged!

"Mr. Morton," cried the boy, and sprang to his side.

The man looked at him in a bewildered way.

"Harry."

"Yes?"

"I'm—I'm—drugged."

"I know it. Let me get you out of here."

"I—can't—walk."

"Lean on me."

"I'll—try."

Harry threw his strong right arm around the form of his employer, and almost lifted him across the floor.

He had not taken two steps when Morton became perfectly limp in his arms and Harry feared that he had relapsed into unconsciousness.

"Mr. Morton."

There was no reply, and the man hung a dead weight on his arm.

Harry looked around him.

Not three feet from where he stood there hung a coil of strong rope, and Harry could see that it was a nearly new inch manilla.

He placed Morton in a chair, and took down the rope.

Harry slung the coil of rope over his shoulder, picked the unconscious man up from the chair, threw him over

his shoulder, where he hung like a dead man, and walked out of the door.

There stood the two horses, and Harry was glad to see that not one of the men who had been talking was in sight. He heard several voices at the rear of the house, and decided that they were talking with the landlord.

With a single effort of his powerful arms the boy lifted Morton to the back of the white stallion, and the drugged man at once fell forward until his hands hung down on either side of the animal's neck.

Harry held on to him, steadied him in that position, and then, with a word to the intelligent horse, proceeded to bind Morton firmly to the back of the steed with the manilla rope.

Around the neck and around the saddle and girth the rope was passed, again and again, and just as Harry had succeeded in tying the last knot that was necessary to hold the unconscious man in position, he heard a loud and angry yell from the house.

He knew what that meant.

"They are gone!"

"After them."

"Kill the foreign beasts!"

"This way."

And then, just as there came a swift rush of many feet, the boy released the bridles from the hitching post, brought the two horses side by side, leaped on the back of Midnight, caught the reins of Morning in his left hand with his own reins, and wheeled the horses so that they faced the mob that came rushing to the door of the inn.

With his disengaged hand the boy drew one of his revolvers, and presented it full at the oncoming men.

"Halt!"

The command was in their own language, and the men came to a very sudden stop.

The landlord was in the front ranks, and to him the infuriated Yankee boy addressed himself.

"Landlord, why do you want to stop me?"

"Because you would rob me."

"Rob you of what?"

"The price of the grand meal that I was preparing for you."

"Oh, you want pay for the meal, do you?"

"Yes."

"Do you want it in silver or gold?"

"Either one."

"Then," said Harry Hale, "as you do not seem particular about the metal in which you are paid, you dispenser of poisoned coffee, I'll pay your bill with lead."

With a quick motion of his hand he raised the self-acting weapon about a foot, and discharged it.

The landlord, with a loud shriek, fell back against the men behind him, throwing the whole party into confusion, and taking advantage of that fact, Harry spoke to the horses and dashed away.

He heard yells and threats behind him, and a single shot rang out on the air, but the badly-aimed bullet did not come anywhere near him.

In less than two minutes he was clear of the little village, and then he turned his eyes upon his employer.

Morton lay like a dead man upon the white stallion, and his heavy breathing told the boy that the poor fellow was deeply drugged.

Harry had found out, to his cost, that the idea that the side roads were less likely to prove dangerous was a mistake, and so he now directed his two steeds back to the main road, feeling that there he was most likely to obtain help to care for Morton.

He put the horses to a gallop, soon regained the road to Lassa, and within a quarter of an hour had overtaken a trading caravan that had come to a halt.

He drew rein at the wagon of the principal dealer, and asked aid to restore his companion to consciousness. The dealer, or trader, was an old man whose face was a passport to the boy's confidence, and when Harry told him that his friend was suffering from drugged coffee the other at once took a look at the sleeping man.

He pulled down the eyelids, took one look at the pupils, and then uttered the single word:

"Opium."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEMAND OF THE TARTAR CHIEF.

Morton was laid carefully upon a bed of straw, and then the trader turned to one of his servants and instructed him to bring the medicine chest.

A box containing a large assortment of bottles was brought, and from the number the trader selected one and uncorked it.

He parted the lips of the unconscious man, dropped a few drops into the mouth, and then allowed Morton's head to fall back.

"Give the medicine a few minutes to work, and your friend will be all right again," he said to Harry, and the confident tone in which he spoke raised a big load from the boy's heart, for he had felt at times that there was a possibility that Morton was drugged beyond the chance of recovery.

"My name is Lan Sing," said the friendly trader, and his manner indicated that he would like to know the name of his visitor, but was too polite (which is the rule with Chinamen of good grade) to ask.

"My name is, Harry Hale," said the Yankee boy, "and my companion is named Ralph Morton. We are Americans, and he is sent here by the United States Government to study various matters in Thibet, and I am his secretary. Now I will tell you why you find us in this trouble."

And then he briefly related to Lan Sing all that had happened since he and Morton had walked the streets of Ba-thang, and Morton had stepped on the sacred dog.

Lan Sing had all the veneration of most Chinese for the sacred dogs, but accepted Harry's assurance that the whole matter was one of accident, and he regarded the boy with open-eyed wonder when the latter declared that he would penetrate even the precincts of the Grand Lamasary itself, if it were necessary, to learn the secret cause of Du Toy's abduction, and to effect her liberation.

"I cannot understand how you can expect to do anything against the power of the Grand Lama," he said. "I am a believer in the religion, and have made two long pilgrimages across thousands of miles to worship at the highest altar, but there are many things that are done in the name of the religion that a man of education and enlightenment, like myself, cannot indorse, and as I am a father, and have daughters of my own, I will try to help you in this matter."

Harry thanked him earnestly, and asked what could be done when the city of Lassa was reached, for it was evident to him that the condition Morton was in would prevent them from getting within striking distance of the Tartar land before the latter reached the home of the Grand Lama.

"What can be done?" he asked.

Lan Sing reflected a moment.

"You speak the language perfectly," he said, "and that

will be an immense help to you in carrying out any scheme. I cannot tell you just what to do, but from my knowledge of the people of Lassa I can suggest that some sort of religious idea is the one that will help you best if you are ever going to get inside the home of the Grand Lama."

"Can you suggest anything further in connection with any religious character that I might assume?"

"Yes. Those who seem to subject themselves to the greatest amount of suffering are generally regarded as being the holiest."

"Thanks," said Harry, and resolved to bear Lan Sing's friendly suggestions in mind.

While the friendly trader was getting a meal ready for the two visitors, the boy sat down by his employer and tried to think out a plan of action when he should reach Lassa.

Within ten minutes of the time that the trader had dropped the medicine between his lips, Morton drew a long breath, sneezed, turned over, and at once sat up and looked around him.

Harry caught his eye, and Morton gave utterance to an exclamation of satisfaction when he saw that he was in the company of his young secretary.

Lan Sing came forward with his medicine chest again, and made Morton take another kind of stuff, and then advised him to lie down until his meal was ready.

Within half an hour the three of them were sitting side by side and eating a substantial meal, while a short distance away the black and white stallions were also munching their food.

The meal was over, and Morton was enjoying some tobacco that the trader had given him, when there came a sudden alarm that brought them all to their feet.

Two shots rang out, and wild cries came from beyond a ledge of rocks that skirted the road to Lassa.

The cries were recognized by Lan Sing as coming from the lips of two of his men whom he had posted as guards on the other side of the rocks to note the approach of any wild bands of Tartars such as frequent the highways of Thibet, and prey upon the poorly guarded trading caravans that are constantly traveling those roads.

On sea or on land there are no more ferocious pirates than the Chinese, and the vast extent of territory infested by the wild Tartar hordes prevented the government from exercising much supervision over the lines of travel that were roamed over by the robber bands. This caused all

caravans, the especial objects of the thieves, to carry a goodly number of men for defense, all well armed.

It was such an attack that now aroused the trader from the comfort of his pipe, and when he saw one of his men running down the road towards him he at once raised his voice and commanded his followers to seize their arms.

On came the man, and Lan Sing looked in vain for the companion he had sent out with him.

"Where is Ah Cly?" he asked.

"Dead, or dying," was the reply, and the speaker held up his left arm to show that he was also wounded. "They surprised us by crawling near, and when we discovered them and fired upon them—there were three of them—they fired in turn at us and hit us both. Ah Cly fell down and then the three men shouted out something and ran towards a cluster of bushes about a thousand feet away, and I am sure that I caught sight of horses and armed men before I turned this way and ran to warn you."

There were five wagons in the trader's outfit, drawn by large and strong teams of yaks, and these were hastily placed inside a circle formed by the big wagons, and the two stallions were also placed within the inclosure.

Within this roughly-framed breastwork the trader and his men crouched in waiting for the attack, armed with rifles for distance defense and with pistols and knives should the battle come to close quarters.

A deep silence fell upon the scene, as all waited for the Tartar band, and all were surprised when a lone horseman came slowly around the concealing curve of the rocks that lined the roadside.

He was attired in the costume of a Tartar leader, and a fine rifle was balanced across the richly ornamented saddle. He bestrode a tall and powerful desert stallion, and looked every inch the wild king that he really was.

He held up one hand to attract attention, and when within two hundred yards of the caravan he called out:

"Is that the caravan of Lan Sing?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"Is he there?"

"I am Lan Sing."

"You have paid tribute to my ruler, and therefore I do not want to make war upon you."

"Then why have you attacked me and killed one of my men and wounded the other?"

"That was done in revenge, and not by my orders. Your men fired upon my men before they could explain what

they wanted, and my men returned the fire without thinking."

"There is no need to ask a Tartar robber what he wants when he approaches a caravan."

"I tell you that I had no intention of making war upon you," was the earnest reply of the Tartar chief, "and that is why I have ridden out here alone to explain what I do want of you. There are two foreign beasts in your caravan, are there not?"

"Yes."

"I want them."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. They must be delivered up to me as prisoners, and then I will go on my way and leave you to go on your way in peace."

"You are a son of the desert, and know its laws better than I do, and when I tell you that these men have broken bread with me and we have eaten of salt together, you know that I cannot give them up to you."

"That is the true law of the desert, and holds true with all of our race, but it has nothing to do with the foreign beasts."

"I will not break it."

"You refuse to give them up to me?"

"I do."

"You have paid tribute to my ruler, but in this I have no choice, so on your head be the result."

"On my head be it," called back Lan Sing, and the Tartar chief was about to turn his horse, when Harry, who had been listening intently to all this, put his hand on the shoulder of the master of the caravan and said:

"Call out to him to grant you but five minutes, and then he shall have your final answer."

"I will not give you up," said the generous trader.

"You need not," significantly said the boy, and then, understanding that his young guest had some idea in asking it, Lan Sing lifted up his voice and called aloud to the Tartar chief to know if he would grant him five minutes in which to arrive at a final decision.

The latter called back that he would do so, and then backed his horse still further away, and called out a command to his concealed followers.

Almost instantly ten mounted men, all fully armed and well equipped for battle, made their appearance, a force that the trader's small party would have difficulty in coping with, for these were fighting men, and the men of

the caravan, while well armed, understood trade better than war.

The men behind the wagons understood that this show of force was made with the idea of influencing the decision of the trader, but they paid no attention to it, their eyes being turned on the Yankee boy.

"Listen, Lan Sing," gravely said the boy, turning to the waiting leader of the caravan, "you have treated us splendidly, fed us and our horses, and we are now in condition to travel a hundred miles if necessary. That is a large force for you to contend with, and we might all lose our lives in trying to battle with the Tartar band. Our horses are the fleetest in this part of the country, and they are now fresh as the day. Open your barricade on the side furthest from the Tartars, and we will slip away on our horses with the speed of the wind. They do not want you, and will therefore follow us, and I tell you that they cannot catch us."

"No; we will stand or fall together."

"Lan Sing, you are a good man, but I tell you that I must have my way in this matter. You have a family, and you shall not put them in danger."

Lan Sing thought of his daughters, looked at the superb steeds that had brought the strangers to his caravan, and then consented. Very quietly one of the wagons was moved slightly to one side, opening up a space not more than four feet wide.

Harry and Morton mounted their horses, saluted their host by lifting their hats, thrusting out their tongues and scratching the right ear (which is the approved and regular mode of salutation in Thibet), and then looked well to their arms.

"Ready?" asked Harry.

"Ready," answered Morton.

"Go!"

Away flew the black and white stallions like arrows, and the two Americans yelled like Comanches on the war-path.

Before they had taken twenty fleet strides they were in full view of the Tartar chief.

An ear-splitting yell announced the discovery, and then they heard the commands of the chief, and an instant later the thunder of many hoofs told them that the entire band was in pursuit.

"Don't go too fast," said Harry to Mr. Morton.

"Why?"

"Because if we distance them too soon, they will give up the chase as hopeless, and then they will be apt to lay the blame upon Lan Sing, and go back and attack him. Let us keep them within sight until we have put many miles between us and the caravan, and then we can give them the laugh and disappear."

"That's right enough," said Morton, "for Lan Sing has proved that he is a good man, and entitled to the utmost consideration on our part."

This idea was carried out, and for mile after mile the black and white stallions were held in check, so as to permit the Tartars to keep within a distance that was encouraging. Then, when Harry thought the right time had come, he turned to Morton and said:

"Now let them out for all their worth."

Released from all restraint on the bit, the two steeds fairly flew over the level stretch of ground, but when Harry Hale, after a few minutes had elapsed, looked back, he saw something that made him exclaim with surprise.

CHAPTER VII.

HARRY HALE TAKES A DESPERATE CHANCE.

Sem Buen had said that the black and white stallions were without equals in all that section of country, but there certainly was one horse that was a match for them, and that was the tall, rawboned steed of the desert, that the Tartar chief rode.

As Harry had predicted, the band had been left behind when the stallions were allowed to have their heads, but not so the Tartar chief.

In fact, he was not only holding his own with them, but it was plain to both Morton and the boy that he was even gaining slightly upon them. He was all alone, it is true, but that did not deter him from urging his mount to the utmost in an endeavor to overtake them.

"Harry," said Morton.

"Yes."

"That fellow is dangerous."

"I know it, and he has one immense advantage of us, and that is that his rifle carries further than our pistols, and he can fire upon us when we cannot return an effective shot."

"Just what I was thinking about. Riding together as

we do, we offer a much larger mark than separately, so I propose we split off and ride about fifty feet apart."

"And then what?"

"Take turns in glancing back and warning each other when he prepares to shoot."

"Very well," assented Harry, and then they divided and rode about twenty yards apart, each one, in turn, glancing swiftly back at the Tartar chief, who was slowly gaining upon them.

Bang!

Harry had just turned his head after a hasty glance behind him, when the report of a rifle rang out on the air, and a bullet sang so very close to his ear that he could not resist the temptation to dodge.

"That was close," he said to Morton, "and the fellow must be a good shot for he fired with a very hasty aim."

"Then I suppose we are doomed men."

"I am afraid so."

Harry cast another hasty glance back at the chief.

The Tartar leader was in the act of raising his rifle to his shoulder, and the boy called out warningly to his employer.

"He's going to fire."

Again the rifle pealed forth its spiteful crack, and Morton threw himself on his horse's neck in time to escape a bullet that certainly would have pierced his body had he remained erect.

And now a desperate idea came into the head of the plucky Yankee boy.

He had looked earnestly at the Tartar chief when the latter was holding the conversation with Lan Sing, and he now tried to recall what kind of rifle the man carried.

He brought the scene again to his mind, and felt sure that the weapon the Tartar carried was a double-barreled rifle.

If he remembered correctly, then the man had fired his two shots, and must reload before he could fire again.

To be sure, many experts with the breech-loading rifle can eject shells and reload and fire with almost incredible swiftness, but Harry did not think that anything in the life of this Tartar robber called for such expertness, and, besides, the case was a desperate one, and he was compelled to take any sort of a chance.

He wheeled his horse suddenly, faced his pursuer, touched the black stallion lightly with the spur, and dashed straight at his enemy.

The Tartar was in the act of reloading his rifle, and that gave Harry the brief instant of time that he needed.

The flying leaps of his gallant horse rapidly cut down the distance between them, and just as the Tartar slipped the shells into the breech of his rifle, Harry came within what he judged to be fair revolver distance.

Without reducing his speed in the least, the Yankee boy raised his pistol and took a hasty aim.

At the same instant the Tartar chief raised his long rifle to his shoulder, but the boy was the quicker of the two, and the report of the .44 split the air before the man could press the trigger.

For a second or two Harry thought that he had missed him, for the man sat erect on his horse with the butt of the rifle pressed to his shoulder, but it was evident that his muscles were paralyzed for he could not press the trigger to discharge the weapon, and within the space of two more seconds he fell from the saddle to the ground.

After he hit the ground he did not stir, and Harry knew that his aim had been true.

Morton came dashing up, and they both rode to the side of the desert charger, who, true to his training, remained by his master.

"Hold on to Midnight's bridle," said the boy to Morton, "for I'm going to take possession of that horse. If we rescue Du Toy we will need another fast animal, and here is the fastest I have ever seen."

He slipped from his horse, and walked up to the desert courser, who proved to be as gentle as he was fleet, and permitted Harry to mount and ride him for a short trial. Satisfied that he could control the horse, the boy next looked the dead Tartar chief over, and decided that it would be a wise move to remove the man's outer clothing for Morton to use as a disguise if needed, while a little staining of the face would alter the color of the American's skin to the hue of the departed chief.

Then they went on their way, and having an extra horse to ride enabled them to change about every twenty miles, and thus ease the burden on all the animals and yet make good time.

No further incident interfered with their steady advance towards the capital, but the many delays made it impossible to overtake the men who had stolen Du Toy, and on the following evening they came to the outskirts of the city of Lassa.

Morton's face had been cleverly stained by Harry with the juice of some berries, and in his disguise he looked every inch a Tartar. The boy had put on the priest's robes that he had retained through all the troubles, and with the fondness that many travelers feel for the pith helmets that are so commonly worn by tourists, he had managed to fold his up and stow it away in one of the capacious pockets of the robe.

Into the town they rode, and Harry, who had read up thoroughly in his guide book, had little difficulty in finding a small European tavern kept by a Frenchman.

Here they made arrangement for the care of themselves and their horses, and then Harry, who wished to keep in the background for a short time, sent Morton out on an errand. He returned shortly, bringing with him some pieces of board, some simple tools, and some fine wire.

Then he and Harry began to work steadily for a few hours, and before bed-time had finished making a rude stool, up through the seat of which more than a hundred nails thrust their sharp points for nearly an inch. Under the broad heads of these nails were little wire springs that the two Americans had made with the aid of a lead pencil and a pair of plyers, and the slightest pressure upon the points of the nails would cause them to sink flush with the surface of the stool seat, but to the eyes of any who might be looking on when a person sat down on the rough stool, it would appear that the scores of points had penetrated the thighs.

Satisfied that they had invented a device that would sufficiently impress the pious among the people of Lassa, Harry and Morton went to bed, determined to try their luck with the populace in the morning.

After breakfast on the following day they sallied forth, Morton carrying the stool, and Harry Hale playing sweetly upon the flute, after the manner of many holy men of the desert. They made their way slowly towards the palace of the Grand Lama upon the rocks, and when within a short distance of it the stool was placed on the ground and Harry began to play wild, sweet music that soon attracted a lot of people. Morton, who did not know just exactly what to do in his character of assistant to this wandering priest, did a regular "way down South" cakewalk, and as this was a new kind of a step to the Thibetans, they stared at him almost as much as they did at Harry.

The gathering crowd stared with expectant interest at the sharp points of the nails in the seat of the stool, and

when Harry thought he had worked up the interest to the proper pitch, he deliberately sat down.

Instantly a chorus of cries went up from the waiting crowd, and Harry knew that his reputation was firmly established.

"He sits on the sharp nails!"

"There are a hundred of them in his flesh!"

"He did not wince."

"He must be a very holy man."

Harry put on a very absorbed expression and continued his flute playing, while Morton went on with his cake-walk and occasionally uttered a yell like a man with the colic. It all struck him so funny that he had hard work to keep from laughing outright, but he knew that such a procedure would spoil the successful show and he managed to keep his face straight.

Harry played on for a few minutes, and then he and Morton walked down the street to get a little closer to the palace of the Grand Lama, the crowd following and talking among themselves.

"He does not even bleed!"

"Such a holy man is under the protection of the highest gods, and they will not let him bleed or suffer pain."

Half-a-dozen times Harry came to a stop and sat down on the cleverly constructed stool, and each time a gasp of admiration went up from the constantly increasing crowd that followed him. Morton went on with his cake-walk, and nearly convulsed the boy with his fancy steps.

In this manner they gradually drew nearer to the gates of the palace, it being the design of the boy to attract the attention of the occupants of the palace, with the hope that as a man of great holiness, he might be invited to come inside.

They had come within a hundred yards of the entrance of the palace, when suddenly cries and shouts announced an event of great importance. The gates of the palace were thrown open, a body of guards issued forth, then came a procession of long-gowned priests, and after the latter came a distinguished-looking man of middle age, clad in a long robe of exceeding richness, at sight of whom all the people in the street prostrated themselves, crying:

"The Grand Lama!"

Harry did not stop playing, but he cast a shy glance at the dignitary out of the corner of his eye. The Grand Lama looked for the source of the music, and caught sight of our hero and his dancing assistant.

"What is this?" he asked.

A hundred voices answered him, vouching for the extreme holiness of the flute-playing priest, and then Harry arose from his seat of nails and bowed in the style of the country to the Grand Lama.

"Who are you?" asked the latter.

Harry told him that he was a priest from the far borders of Thibet, and had passed his life in fasting and prayer. He had just made this statement when a great uproar arose within the gates of the palace, shouts and cries and also shrieks of fear sounded on the air, and forth through the gates rushed a man of middle age, holding in either hand a long and sharp knife, and it was evident that they had been used on some of the persons within the gates whose agonized shrieks had been heard.

The man's eyes were rolling in his head, froth flecked his lips, and it was evident that he was in a perfect frenzy. It occurred at once to Harry that the man was maddened by some drug, opium or hasheesh, and was in that condition that is known as "running amuck."

"The Grand Lama!" shrieked the maddened man, making straight at the great dignitary. "The Grand Lama! I want his life!"

Not only the priests and the populace, but the armed guards, likewise, seemed panic-stricken, and fled in all directions from the man with the two knives, who made his way without hindrance towards the Grand Lama. Harry was the only one left near him, and the boy saw his opportunity and made the most of it.

The maniac was almost upon the Grand Lama, and the latter closed his eyes in expectation of his death blow. Everybody else was running away, and nobody saw the quick, heavy blow that the Yankee boy dealt the crazy man with the flute, knocking him senseless to the ground, so Harry, quick-witted as ever, made up his mind to turn the affair into a miracle, and applying the flute to his lips he began to play the instant that the madman fell before him.

And so it was that when the sweet strains of the flute caused the frightened people to pause in their mad rush, they saw the assassin lying on the ground, apparently overcome by the musical priest just as he was about to take another life. The Grand Lama also looked up, and gazed in wonder scarcely less than that shown by the people.

"You have saved my life," said the Grand Lama.

"Buddha saved your life," solemnly said Harry. "This flute, which has been blessed by the spirit of Buddha, was

powerful enough to strike down the assassin by holy music."

"He would have killed me," said the Grand Lama, who seemed to think more of the assault on himself than he did of the holy miracle. "He shall be torn apart on a score of spears."

CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY HALE ENTERS THE LAMASARY.

Harry saw a chance to add to his reputation as a man of great holiness, and he begged for the man's life. The Grand Lama reluctantly granted it, and when the drug-eazed man came to his senses he was led away a prisoner.

Then the Grand Lama, who had been much upset by the recent experience he had gone through, decided to postpone the trip he had started out to make, and when he turned back to re-enter the palace he invited the holy man from the far border of the country to go in with him. Harry accepted the invitation, and Morton walked off to their lodgings with the stool.

When they were seated in the principal reception-room of the palace the Grand Lama asked Harry to tell him fully and freely about himself, and the boy, who had gotten up his face most artistically with Morton's aid, gravely told him that he was a hundred and ten years old, and had spent seventy-five years of his life in the service of Buddha.

"Then," said the Grand Lama, with an expression of triumph on his face, "I am to have the pleasure of showing you the most important and wonderful sight that you have ever seen in all your long religious career."

"And what is that?" asked the pretended priest.

"As a learned priest," said the Grand Lama, "you know the wonderful distinguishing mark that is seen on those who inherit any portion of the spirit of Buddha, do you not?"

Of course, Harry didn't know, but it wouldn't do for him to say so, therefore he nodded his head and trusted to luck.

"Only twice in a thousand years has this peculiar mark, the double cross of a pinkish shade, situated near the left temple, been seen on man or woman by those who have ever been on the outlook for it," went on the Grand Lama, "and now it has fallen to me, the present head of the or-

der, to possess the person showing this descent from Buddha. The mark has reappeared after a lapse of centuries on the left temple of a young girl who lived with her father in the nearby town of Bathang, and I have had her removed here to the palace, where, for the rest of her life, she will be kept a prisoner in the inner temple, where hundreds of pilgrims from far and near will come to gaze upon her and worship the sacred mark, and lay fortunes in gold, silver and jewels at the feet of her who bears the distinguishing mark of our god."

Harry shuddered at the fate in store for Du Toy.

But, to impress the Grand Lama, he threw up his hands and muttered praises of the other's infamous act, and begged that he might be permitted to gaze upon such a wonderful sight.

Immensely flattered, the Grand Lama led the way to the sacred precincts of the inner temple, and ushered Harry past the half-dozen guards that stood with immense spears at the door. Harry advanced into the room, and when he had become accustomed to the dim light that came through the stained-glass windows and which was further made gloomy by the rich and heavy hangings on all sides of the apartment, he saw Du Toy sitting disconsolately in a big chair lined with crimson silk, her face pale and tear-streaked, and her beautiful eyes red with much weeping.

"What think you of that, brother from the far borders of Tibet?" asked the Grand Lama, pointing to where a faint pink double cross could be seen on the left temple of the sad-soul girl.

"Wonderful! marvelous!" exclaimed Harry, and the pretty girl started when she heard his voice and looked closely at him. "I will utter a prayer in the language of the secret sect to which I belong, and thank the spirit of Buddha that I am permitted to look upon a being who unites us of this world with him."

And then the Yankee boy dropped down prostrate before the chair on which the girl was seated, and said in English:

"Du Toy, it is I, Harry Hale, one of the two Americans whom you and your father rescued from death in Bathang. Do not utter a word, or in any way give rise to the suspicion that you know me, and now that I have managed to get within these walls and gained the favor of the Grand Lama, you can rest assured that I will find some way to effect your escape. The people regard me as a very holy man, and as I was fortunate enough to save the life of the

Grand Lama within the hour, I stand well with him and will no doubt be permitted much freedom. I shall stay here as the guest of the head of the order, and I'll back myself to hatch up some scheme which within the next day or two will enable you and me to get away in safety."

He concluded his long speech with half-a-dozen nods of his head, as though it were a prayer of some kind, and then arose and looked the girl meaningly in the face.

Du Toy made no sign, but her eyes spoke for her.

Harry looked around for the Grand Lama, and saw that he had retreated to a position near the door of the inner temple, and at a signal from him the boy walked forward and out of the room.

The instant he passed from the room he was seized by several pairs of hands, his priestly robes torn from him, and half-a-dozen spears pointed at his breast!

Harry Hale was a strong-nerved boy, but this assault was so rapid and successful that he was made breathless by it. He turned at the sound of a low and triumphant chuckle, and saw the Grand Lama standing within two feet of him and shaking with laughter.

"So, my American friend," he said, in very fair English, "you forgot that the Grand Lama is always a man of education, and may speak a half-dozen languages. You should have thought of that before making your imitation prayer at the feet of the girl. You have betrayed yourself, and only the fact that you did really save my life prevents me from instantly consigning you to the fate of all who dare to enter the sacred precincts of the inner temple when they are not of our creed. Lucky, indeed, it was for you that you saved me from the knives of the assassin, or within an hour you would have been food for the sacred dogs."

Then he turned to the guards, who had been examining the priestly robes that he had torn from the boy, and said:

"Let him be confined under guard in the lowest cells, until I have decided what shall be his fate."

At that instant the helmet that Harry had concealed in one of the immense pockets of the long robe, was thrown to the floor at the boy's feet, and mechanically he stooped, lifted it from the floor and put it on.

"Now you look like what you are, one of those impudent American tourists whom I shall teach a lesson that will serve as a warning to others of the race that would meddle in my affairs," said the Grand Lama, with a malignant expression on his face, and then he once more ad-

ressed the guards, who stood with leveled spears, and said in Chinese:

"Take him away!"

Infuriated beyond measure, the Yankee boy raised his hand as though ready to assail his armed guards.

Then the absurdity of resistance came into his mind, and he determined to try the effect of pleading. Turning to his captor he said:

"I acknowledge that you have captured me fairly, and that I betrayed myself into your hands, but I appeal to you to remember that your very guards deserted you but a short time ago, and that the knives of a madman were within a second of being plunged into your heart when I interfered to save your life. I have done you no real harm, and therefore, in return for saving your life, I ask that you give me my liberty."

His appeal seemed to affect his captor, who considered a moment, and then told the guards to step aside.

"Your eloquence has touched my heart," he said. "Yonder you can see the bright light of day streaming through that arch. Beyond it is freedom. Go!"

Harry started toward the arch, and the Lama uttered a sneering laugh. Four Mongols, armed with spears, appeared in the opening and aimed at the boy.

Then the boy understood that his captor was simply amusing himself, and had no intention of liberating him. He looked through the arch and the bright light of day looked inviting and tempting, but the leveled spears of the four Mongols were all aimed at his breast, and only sure death lay in his path.

He realized the folly of making any attempt at resistance, which could only result in his instant death, and suffered himself to be led away. He was taken down to a cell below the surface of the ground, and there thrust behind barred doors and left to his thoughts.

They were, as may be imagined, of the gloomiest possible description.

But a short time before and he had felt confident that with his standing in the palace he would sooner or later be able to effect the rescue of Du Toy, and now here he was a prisoner, himself, and with an unknown fate awaiting him.

"Hang the luck!" heartily said the boy. "Who would have thought that the Grand Lama understood English? Well, I suppose I can give myself up as a goner, for the very best that I can hope for is to be made a prisoner for

life, and the first time that the Grand Lama has a grudge to square on account of anybody he'll-forget that I saved his life."

Plunged in these gloomy reflections he sat on a rude bench in his cell, and more than an hour passed by without a sound reaching him to disturb his sad thoughts.

Then he heard footsteps outside the door of his cell, and from words that reached him he understood that his guard had been changed.

This did not interest him, and his chin was again on his hands and his thoughts far away, when the little wicket in the center of his door was opened and Harry looked up to meet the gaze of the new sentinel.

The man was a stranger to him, and Harry wondered what he wanted. The other looked carefully up and down the corridor before speaking, and then he said in low tones, as though afraid of being overheard:

"I am Wing Chang."

"Well?" said Harry.

"Ban Hook is my father."

"Well?"

"Ban Hook was crazed with drugs when he made the attack on the Grand Lama and he would have been murdered at once had you not saved him. I love my father and I am grateful to you, and if there is any way in which I can serve you, I am willing to run any risk."

The man's voice vibrated with feeling, and Harry Hale began to feel that the situation, although bad enough, was not so helpless as it seemed a few minutes before.

He spoke softly to the guard:

"Wing Chang."

"Yes?"

"Do you know the palace well?"

"Very well."

"Is there any way of getting out of the inner temple except through the doorway where the guards stand?"

"Yes; there is a door that is concealed by a hanging drapery. It is behind the great chair in which the girl sits who is partly descended from Buddha."

"Wing Chang," earnestly said the boy, "she is not descended from Buddha, and I tell you this that you may have no scruples in helping me to get her out of the palace. I was a guest at the home of her father in Bathang a few nights ago, and I questioned her about that mark on her left temple, and she told me that it was left as the result

of a small surgical operation that was performed on her ten years ago."

"This is the truth?" demanded Wing Chang.

"By everything I hold dear and sacred, I swear to you that it is true."

"I believe you, and I will assist you in any way, although I shall lose my life when the Grand Lama discovers what I have done."

"If you had money and a good horse, could you not get so far away that his vengeance could not reach you?" asked Harry.

"Yes, but that would take much money, and I have none."

Harry felt within his clothing and found the bag of gold that the forethought of Sem Buen had provided.

He handed one of them to Wing Chang, and the latter at once grew hopeful as he felt the weight of gold within it.

"Now," said Harry, "where does that door lead to that you say is behind the great chair in the inner temple?"

"To a flight of steps that descends to the garden at the rear of the palace."

"Could horses be led within that garden?"

"Yes, when it is dark and late."

"I mean after midnight."

"Yes, that could be done."

"Here is another bag of gold for you," said the boy, passing it out through the wicket, "and when we are safely away from here you may depend upon enough to make you independently rich for the rest of your life, for the father of the girl is a man of wealth, and this is his only child. Now listen, and I'll tell you what I want you to do. With the money in your possession you can buy a good horse for your own use. At the tavern kept by the Frenchman near the military headquarters, you will find the companion who danced to my music this morning.

"He is an American, like myself, and I will give you a note to him so that he will trust you, and do what you say. You must purchase a quantity of the best wine, and put enough opium in it to stupefy the guards at the door of the inner temple. Do you think they will drink with you?"

"Willingly, especially if the wine be good."

"Let it be the finest. If you are sure that you can drug the guards so that they will be unconscious by midnight or after, then you can instruct my friend to be at

the rear of the garden with the horses, all of them, by that time.

"As for the rest of the plan, you know whether all but the guards will be asleep in the palace at that hour, and whether there will be any obstacle to liberating me and conducting me to the inner temple."

"It will all be clear shortly after midnight," said Wing Chang, "and then I can come for you and lead you to the girl. The front and sides of the palace are guarded night and day, but there is never any guard at the rear, because it looks like a solid wall there, not even the stairway appearing that leads down a short flight to the garden until the secret door is opened."

"Then there is every chance of success," jubilantly said Harry Hale, as he pressed still another bag of gold into the hands of the man who now held his fate in his hands. "I will now give you the note to my friend, and you must deliver it at the first opportunity."

"I am now on guard until the man I relieved has his dinner," was the reply, "and after that I shall be at liberty until I take his place for the watch that begins at midnight. I shall tell a story to the guards that are to take the midnight watch outside the door of the inner temple that will satisfy them as to the wine, and you can be sure that shortly after midnight they will be as helpless as so many dead men."

"I hope so," said Harry Hale.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

The deep bells rang out the hour of midnight.

Down in the depths of his lonely cell the Yankee boy heard the welcome sound, and was glad to know that the period of suspense was soon to end.

The attempt might succeed, and there were chances that it would fail, but Harry Hale felt that anything was better than the uncertainty that was wearing his spirits down to the zero mark.

The sound of footsteps on the pavement of the corridor came to his ears and then he heard the voice of Wing Chang, and knew that his Chinese friend was to go on guard.

Then came the noise of retreating feet, and Harry waited until Wing Chang should think it prudent to speak.

The latter allowed ten minutes to pass by, and then he tapped on the little wicket, and slid it up so that Harry could see his face in the lighted passage.

"All ready?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

Wing Chang lifted bars from the upper and lower parts of the door, and pulled it open. With a sigh of relief the boy stepped out into the corridor, and took in a deep breath.

"Everything has been attended to," said the Chinaman. "The guards are now drinking the drugged wine and will soon be past any resistance, and your companion is in the garden with the horses. There is nobody awake in this part of the palace except the guard who has just been relieved, and he will be drunk and asleep from the wine I have left in his room within the next ten minutes and after that there will be nothing to stand in our way."

Harry wished that he possessed some weapon other than the loaded flute, which the superstitious Chinese had permitted him to retain, but when he came to think the matter over he realized that silent weapons were the only ones that he could safely use.

They allowed another ten minutes to pass by, and then Wing Chang led the way up the stairs and towards the door of the inner temple.

They passed by the arch with which the Grand Lama had sneeringly fooled the boy, and then into the hallway that led to the inner temple.

Here the light was very dim, and Harry could not see whether the guards were standing up or had fallen down.

Wing Chang was in advance of him about two or three feet, and had gone about three steps into the dim corridor when a man leaped at him and caught him by the arm.

It was the captain of the guard of the inner temple.

"Wing Chang," he hissed, "what are you doing here?"

"I came to see if you wanted more wine."

"I suspected your wine, and did not drink any, or I might have been lying unconscious like my men," said the captain of the guard. "You are supposed to be on guard over the prisoner in the deep cell, and yet you are prying around here, while my men are stupefied with the wine you gave them. You are my prisoner, and I shall hold you until the morning and expose you to the Grand Lama, who will load me with honors when—"

But that was as far as he got.

Harry had only waited in the shadow behind Wing Chang until he learned that the rest of the guard had succumbed to the influence of the drugged wine, and then he acted.

He understood the cleverness of Wing Chang in not attempting a resistance that would have created an alarm and probably spoiled everything, and realized that the friendly Mongol was relying upon him for assistance in quieting the captain of the guard.

Grasping his loaded flute by the light end he raised it high in the air, took one quick step forward, and struck.

The guard saw him when it was too late to avoid the blow.

He opened his mouth to cry out, but the blow was a swift one and landed on his head before the effort to shout an alarm reached his lips, and he went down heavily to the floor.

Harry and Wing Chang stood perfectly still for a moment, fearing that the man had aroused somebody by the noise of his fall, but minute after minute passed and perfect quiet reigned.

Then they advanced along the corridor, and near the door saw the outstretched and motionless forms of the drugged guards, their heavy breathing telling how well the drugged wine, furnished by Wing Chang, had done its work.

Stepping over their still forms they reached the door, threw it open, and strode into the inner temple.

Du Toy was asleep in the great chair in which the boy had seen her sitting, and in the soft light of the shaded lamps she looked so very tempting that Harry awakened her by kissing her on the lips.

She awoke in full possession of her senses, and although she blushed furiously when she realized that the boy had kissed her, she did not seem at all displeased.

"This means freedom," joyfully said Harry. "Take one of these covers from the couch to wrap around you for protection from the chilly night air, and then we will go."

She looked up at him trustfully and said:

"I would go anywhere with you."

And then it was Harry's turn to blush.

Wing Chang found the rear door of the temple, opened it, and a short flight of steps fell down toward the garden.

"Come," he said, leading the way, and putting his arm around the girl to guide her, Harry followed him down the few steps that showed dimly in the light of the stars.

Wing Chang led the way for ten steps further, and then Harry saw dark figures before him, and the welcome voice of his employer softly said:

"Is that you, Harry?"

"Yes," was the reassuring reply, and the next minute the two Americans were clasping hands.

Four horses stood near, saddled and bridled, and when the black and white stallions recognized Du Toy they rubbed their soft nozzles against her.

Wing Chang had purchased a speedy animal, and now they all mounted, and the Chinaman led the way out of the garden.

He knew the road well, and conducted them by back streets until the broad and open way out of the city was reached, and then they gave the horses their heads and they stretched away towards Bathang in a long, swinging gallop that was kept up, mile after mile.

All night long they rode, stopping only for a few minutes to breathe the horses, and then on again in that tire-

less gallop that placed them beyond danger of successful pursuit.

With the dawn of the morning they saw the wagons and tents of a small caravan, and when they neared it, were delighted to find that it was that of Du Toy's father and his party.

When the pretty girl was restored to her father's arms the gratitude of the merchant knew no bounds, and as neither Harry nor Morton would accept anything but his thanks, Wing Chang came in for all the substantial part of it, and told the boy that with the wealth Sem Buen intended to bestow on him he would be able to go to some far country and there live at ease for life.

It was a joyous party that made its way back to Bathang, and although all hands kept a sharp eye out for pursuit, not a single follower of the Grand Lama appeared to spoil their pleasure, and three days later they were once more safely sheltered under the hospitable roof of Sem Buen.

Morton and Harry decided, that in view of recent events it would not be healthy for them to return to Lassa, and turned their attention to other portions of the country. The boy and the pretty girl he had so cleverly rescued, made eyes at each other, and Sem Buen expressed the hope that Harry would positively return to Bathang after he had concluded his service with his employer, and with a long look at Du Toy the American lad said that he surely would do so.

Then the two Americans said good-by to the worthy Thibetan merchant, and Harry and Du Toy did not hesitate about kissing each other while the rest looked on with smiling approval, and then, for a time, at least, they parted, the pretty girl to dream night and day about the brave Yankee boy who had rescued her when she was lost in the heart of China, and he to think about the Chinese beauty he had torn from the clutches of the Grand Lama when she was a sad-eyed prisoner in the land of skulls.

THE END.

Read "RUINED BY DRINK; OR, JACK JORDAN'S PERIL," which will be the next number (17) of "All Around Weekly."

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CHOICE READING MATTER.

It is announced as a fact that a clever workman in a needle factory once readily succeeded in boring a hair belonging to King William of Prussia, the grandfather of the present emperor. The incident occurred when William was visiting a Prussian needle factory. As he was passing through the shop he was impressed at the minuteness of a number of tiny needles, thousands of which would not have weighed an ounce. On examining them he could not understand how such a tiny piece of steel could be pierced with an eye. The workman whose business it was to bore the eyes in the needles looked up and smilingly asked for a hair from the monarch's head. It was readily given to him, and he placed it under the boring-machine, made an eye in it, furnished it with thread, and handed the singular needle to the astonished King.

It is not in our own era that the inhabitants of Manhattan Island have got into the way of combining extravagance with their feasts. Esther Singleton tells in her "Dutch New York" of old burgher cronies who on one occasion dined at the City Tavern to the extremity of \$50 a cover, present value. The record of the banquet is preserved because the burghers did not settle promptly and the case went to court. There were other feasts concerning which we may only surmise that the prosperous Dutchmen did not stint themselves in good living. Evidence offers itself that in those days drunkenness was scarcely a reproach. Indeed, it was the collections from a wedding party with purse-strings loosened by indulgences that started the building of the church of the fort. In 1646 one person in every four in New Amsterdam was a seller of strong drinks!

There is a valuable strip of land on Michigan Avenue that nobody seems to own. At least no one has been able to pry his ownership as yet. It is the thirty-four-foot strip left between the roadway of the street and the new sidewalk that the commissioners have been laying in Grant Park north of Jackson Boulevard. At the rate real estate values have piled up on downtown property within the last few years it is figured that there is an alderman's ransom—kingly ransoms being out of date—tied up in this patch of ground. Three-eighths of a mile long, it contains 67,320 square feet, valued at more than \$4,000,000, if neighboring values are to be accepted. But, characteristic of conditions on the lake front, much uncertainty surrounds its ownership. Instead of fighting over it, however, calling in Fernando Jones and rushing to the Supreme Court, the City and Park Board has decided to plant grass seed and call it "quits."

"When brooks, streams and ponds become dry most fishes die," says Francis B. Brennan, of Philadelphia. "Some kinds, however, like eels and catfish, are able to survive for a considerable time by burrowing into the wet or moist bottom, which may be quite dry at the surface. This is particularly true of some tropical fishes found in regions subject to drought, where it is a matter of common observation that a pond depression that has been baked by the sun's rays for days or weeks, will immediately after a heavy rainfall, afford good fishing. The ability of certain tropical fishes to endure drought and to remain out of the water for a long time in the markets, depends on the possession of an accessory gill on the under side of each gill cover, by means of which oxygen may be taken directly from the atmosphere. Failure to notice dead fish after the drying out of brooks or ponds simply means that birds and four-footed beasts, often night prowlers, have been there first. One of the most important lines of work carried on by the fisheries branch of the Government is the rescue of food and game fishes from the overflowed lands in the Mississippi Valley. After the floods subside, shallow pools are left that are wholly disconnected from the streams, and in these the fishes gradually perish as the drying of the pools progresses. By sending men to seine these pools the Government each year saves and returns to public waters hundreds of thousands of valuable fishes."

RIB TICKLERS.

Golfer—The day I get round these links in under a hundred, I'll give you a shilling, Sandy! Caddie—Hoo will I want it, when I'm drawin' me auld-age pension?

Farmer (to the editor of local paper)—I want to put a notice in your newspaper of the death of my brother. What's your price? Editor—Ten shillings, and sixpence an inch, sir. Farmer—Oh, I can't afford that; my brother was six feet two.

A Canadian author wrote an anthem for a recent celebration in Toronto. Toward the end of the exercises, when the people were going out a few at a time, the author rushed to the conductor and said: "Is it over?" "Practically." "But, great Scott, man, they haven't sung my anthem!" "Well," said the conductor, "so long as the people are going out peacefully and quietly, why sing it at all?"

There are many people like the old negro who was lying out in the field in the shade of a tree. The planter came along and saw a strange negro lying under the tree in his field in the afternoon. He looked at him and said, "You negro, what are you doing?" He says, "Boss, I 'be the man that was sent here for to hoe dis field." "Well, what's the matter? Why ain't you hoeing; are you tired?" He says, "No, sir, I ain't 'zackly tired; I was just waiting for the sun to set so that I could quit work."

There are some legal questions that a witness cannot answer by a simple yes or no, and a browbeating lawyer will sometimes take advantage of this fact. One of this class was once demanding that a witness answer a certain question either in the negative or affirmative. "I cannot do it," said the witness. "There are some questions that cannot be answered by a 'yes' or a 'no,' as any one knows." "I defy you to give an example to the court," thundered the lawyer. The retort came in a flash. "Are you still beating your wife?" A sickly grin spread over the lawyer's face and he sat down.

LOVE IN THE HOLIDAYS

By Kit Glyde.

"Black your boots, sir?"

A sweet and clear voice thus attracted my ear, as I, Walter Wetmore, lawyer, idled along the street during the Christmas holidays.

I had no sooner caught the melancholy sweetness of the cry than I turned my eyes upon the little implore, and resolved upon having his "black" in the only wish to learn something of his unfortunate history.

He was of delicate frame, of stature tall for one so young, of mild blue eyes, most interesting features, and with an address which tacitly betrayed respectable birth and exalted feelings.

"My little fellow," said I, "you look sickly and ill-fitted for so bootless a work. What's your name, and where do you live?"

"My name, sir, is Rupert Lindsay, and I live at number thirty-three — Street," was the simple reply; and it was spoken with a sweetness rarely becoming his appearance.

I questioned him also about his parentage and circumstances, when I noticed that tears were falling from his large and beautiful eyes.

"Well, Rupert," I said in a light and careless tone, "this is certainly a new way you have of moistening blacking—with your tears. What's the matter, boy?"

But instead of an answer, tears flowed faster and thicker, until they had spotted the polish he had worked so lustily to apply.

At length he stopped, and looking up into my face, said: "I wish, sir, you could find time to visit my mother to-morrow, in the morning. She is very ill, sir. Please come."

And then he strove away at his task, but his excessive weeping prevented its accomplishment to his satisfaction; when I spoke: "That will do, Rupert. Those tear-blemishes make my boots shine all the brighter to me."

And away I hastened, for—for—well, no matter.

The next morning found me threading my way through a district of New York long known for its unthrifty and squalor.

After some difficulty I discovered the street and number to which I had been directed by my newly-made acquaintance.

Ascending a noisome staircase, I came to a door designated as the quarters of Mrs. Lindsay.

Upon knocking, I was ushered into the presence of an elderly lady, with high cap and kerchief, and spectacles that could not conceal the gentle expression of her eyes—eyes above which the brow had not frequently frowned. Her face, though wan and worn, retained the traces of early beauty, and a courteous and attentive ease of deportment too fully betokened respectable birth. Like the old horse-hair sofa on which she was half reclining, her earthly day and glory had departed.

The comparative cleanliness and arrangement of the scanty furniture in the room gave evidence of an orderly and, refined taste, which I wondered that so infirm an old lady could display, when, by Jove!—excuse the mythological epithet—a young maiden of no common clay stood before me, offering to relieve me of my hat and umbrella. The most striking resemblance to the little shoeblack of the day before convinced me that she was his sister. But how strong a resemblance!

She was surpassingly beautiful.

After chatting about sundry things, the good old lady favored me with a sort of epitome of her past life.

She had been early accustomed to good society; had been discarded and disowned by an arrogant father and incensed friends on account of an impolitic marriage alliance. The object of her idolatrous love and sacrifice had been removed from her earthly sight, soon after marriage, by reason of excessive literary labor and disappointments, leaving two children, since which time, mainly dependent on her for subsistence.

"I have grimly fought against penury," she added, "until I am now unable to do so longer, for—"

And here the stricken one bent her head and wept bitterly.

"Have no fears or concern about the welfare of your children," I subjoined, apprehending the rest of her observation.

"While I live I will assume the guardianship of Rupert and—"

I hesitated, and would have included her adorable Ethel (as she was named) within the same responsibility, but dared not, so unwarranted had been my presumption already.

"I observe, with no small delight, your manifest concern for my child," at length she continued, checking her tears; "but, Mr. Wetmore, it is my duty to declare to you that, whereas, at the death of my husband I had two children, I am now blessed with but one; and she is indeed a blessing"—pointing to the sweet-faced Ethel, who was engaging herself in the preparation of some decoction for the benefit of the speaker.

"Then my little friend of yesterday, who was so kind as to direct me to your presence, is not your son?" I interrogated.

With one hand supporting her head, and with the other still pointing to her daughter, she whispered: "Yonder is my Rupert."

"Your statement is very mysterious, Mrs. Lindsay," I exclaimed with unbounded astonishment. "Be pleased to explain; I hope my solicitation does not merge into an unreasonable assumption."

"Most willingly, my dear sir, will I dispel the mystery which you so reasonably discover. On Friday of last week I was prevented from doing my accustomed needlework, and which, I need not tell you, was essentially necessary for our support. The symptoms of a disease of the heart, which have for many months predicted my death, on that day seemed to attack me with increased threatenings and vigor. During the five days of my last illness there was, perhaps, greater danger of my death from starvation than from any other cause. My Ethel then"—and her voice trembled—"had been the week before discharged from the milliner's shop where she worked, on account of the failure of the proprietress. So there was no bread for us to eat. Well, sir, to tell you without words—for I am very weak—my darling daughter borrowed the garments and utensils of a shoeblack who had lately died and been resident in the house, from the use of which, in two days, her delicate hands had earned nearly two dollars. Happily, a friend was found in you. You know the rest. Though it was seemingly an unmaidenly act—"

"A most noble act, rather!" I interrupted. "Really, it quite transcends anything I have ever heard or seen of like character," I added to myself.

And we talked—all three of us—until the shadows, like the little elfs, began to climb up over the small casement into the room, when I took my leave of the gentle Ethel and her mother. Early on the day following, of course, I visited the shelter of the loved one; but that hard old tyrant who touches the blood into ice had paid an earlier visit. The mother was dead!

Well, to tie up my thoughts and experiences into a comely knot, Ethel became my ward—and afterward my wife.

That clear, sad, heart-piercing cry: "Black your boots, sir?" brought me a friend whom Heaven has ordained to accompany me, Walter Wetmore, down the dusty highway of the years into the great hereafter.

THE ACCUSING SPECTER

In a distant Southern State, during the last year of the Civil War, when the star of the Confederacy was going down in the smoke and gloom of a bloody defeat, a man rode up to the village hotel and demanded accommodations for himself and beast. He was promptly taken in charge by the jolly landlord and his wife, and given the good quarters as the establishment afforded.

There was an air of unassuming dignity about the stranger, which commanded involuntary respect. He ordered supper, and after dispatching it seated himself in the front porch of the hotel, and gave himself up to the quiet enjoyment of a fine Havana.

On the lower end of the porch sat half a dozen individuals, all dressed in semi-military uniform, and armed with bowies and revolvers. They were attracted by the citizen's dress, and quiet demeanor of the stranger, and began to discuss him in whispers.

One of their number applied at the office, and found simply "John Hutchinson" registered there. Of course the information was not what they desired.

They wanted to know more.

"I say, stranger," said Bob Cranston, a heavy-bearded, beetle-browed fellow in the little party, who deliberately rose up and stalked over to where Hutchinson was sitting, "where do you hall from?"

"I am from Virginia, sir. Why do you ask?"

"Which way are you going?" Bob asked, without noticing the question put to him.

"I am going about my business, sir," was the curt reply of Hutchinson.

"What might that business be, stranger?" was the next question, the frigidity of which rather startled the stranger.

"My business, sir," he answered, "is to defend my right to attend to my own affairs in my own way, without the assistance of strangers, and I have the reputation of being a good business man in that line."

"Wal, now, that's a good business. What might be your business here, eh?"

With a look of annoyance on his face, Hutchinson arose and walked into the little office of the hotel, leaving Cranston standing by the vacant chair gazing after him. A few minutes later he went upstairs to his room.

That was the last ever seen of John Hutchinson.

The next morning his room was found empty—the bed not having been occupied during the night. His horse remained in the stable, a large, fine charger. His strange disappearance created no little comment, but other scenes were now quickly occurring between the two great contending armies of the two sections, which absorbed the attention of not only the people of that little village, but of the entire civilized world; hence it was soon forgotten.

The landlord kept the missing man's horse several months in his stable, and then had him sold by the sheriff to pay charges. He bought him in himself, his bill being allowed in the amount of his bid.

One night, three years after the unaccountable disappearance of Hutchinson, Bob Cranston suddenly reappeared in the village, the possessor of a large fortune. He had been gone since the close of the war, and had not been heard from during that time. He claimed to have made a fortune in speculations immediately after the war.

He brought property in the village, and proceeded to build a fine residence, saying he intended to get a wife and settle down into the quiet life of a country gentleman.

When the finishing touches were being put to his elegant mansion, the finest in all that section of country, he sent out invitations to all his acquaintances, male and female, to a grand banquet and formal opening of the house.

Cranston made great preparations for the occasion, sending to a neighboring city for champagne, a band of music, and such other things as could not be obtained in the village.

The eventful evening came, and with it the invited guests from all the country. They swept through the gorgeously furnished halls of the mansion to the enchanting strains of music such as they had never heard before, and almost thought themselves in fairyland.

Suddenly they were all startled by hearing a wild, piercing scream from one of the young ladies, who immediately fell to the floor in a death-like swoon.

The cause was unknown, and she was taken up and quickly carried into one of the rooms, where she was taken in charge by the elderly ladies, and the village doctor sent for.

But two minutes later another lady screamed and fainted in another part of the house.

"Why, what can the matter be?" exclaimed Cranston, fearing the excitement would interfere with the success of the entertainment.

Then another scream from another part of the house followed, and the excitement began to take the form of fear.

"Oh, murder, murder!" screamed another lady in the main hall, dashing away through the throng of now frightened guests.

"Oh, Lord!" gasped old man Rogers, who had now come into the main reception room. "I saw a man just now with his throat cut round to his ears."

"It's a lie!" shrieked Cranston, springing toward the trembling old man like an enraged tiger.

"Look there," cried another, staring wildly and pointing toward an open door, in the center of which stood the tall, dignified figure of a man, a ghastly, bloody opening in his throat under his chin, from which the blood flowed freely over the bosom of his shirt.

A cry of horror escaped the party as they gazed upon the horrible sight. The apparition raised its right hand, and deliberately pointing its index finger at Cranston, advanced upon him. The party of gentlemen around him gave way, leaving him standing alone, his eyes almost bursting from his head, and his face a picture of horror and terror. His knees smote together, his teeth rattled against each other as the ghastly spectacle approached him. He tried to fly, but terror made his limbs useless.

The apparition came nearer and nearer, the moments seeming hours.

"I didn't do it!" shrieked Cranston. "I didn't do it!"

The next moment the finger of the apparition touched the forehead of Cranston, who instantly burst into a wild, hysterical laugh.

"Ha! ha! ha! John Hutchinson, is it you? Ha! ha! ha! I did it, did I?" and the laughing ended in a maniacal shriek that plainly told of reason dethroned.

The next instant the ghastly apparition disappeared, no one knew whither; and Bob Cranston lay a helpless maniac on the floor of his palatial residence. He was taken in charge by the village doctor, who tried in vain to coax reason back to its place. The maniac was conveyed to the lunatic asylum, where he yet laughs and talks about John Hutchinson.

An investigation of papers found in Cranston's house showed that he had murdered Hutchinson and obtained an immense fortune by using warehouse receipts for cotton, which Hutchinson had on his person. Further than that all remains a dark mystery to this day. Was it Hutchinson's ghost?

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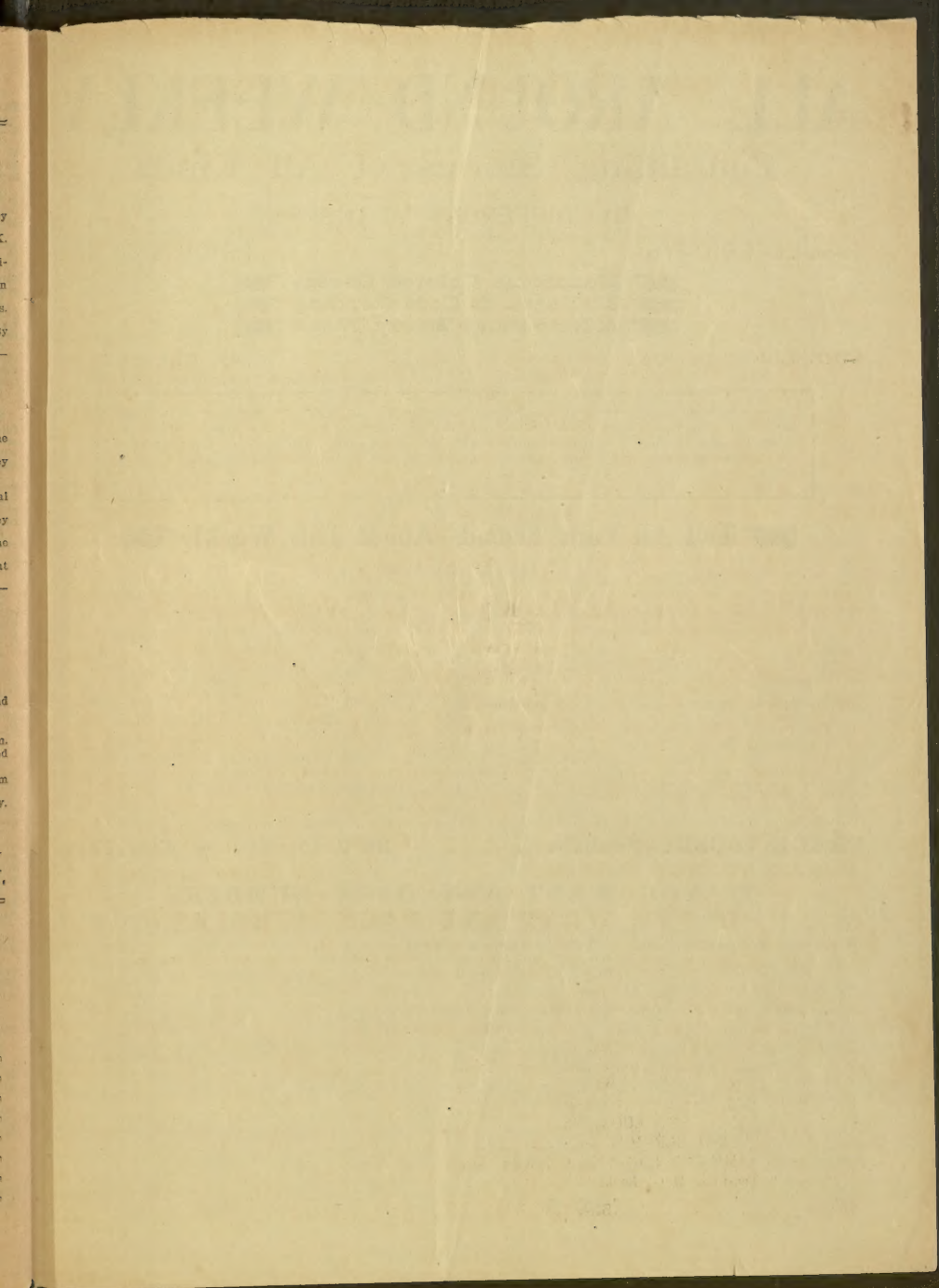
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